Game of the Month: MISSIONFORCE: CYBERSTORM

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PC GAMES

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO COMPUTER GAMING

94 NEW GAMES

ROCK THE GAMING PLANET!

BETHESDA'S SkyNET

SPECIAL REPORT: Electronic Entertainment Expo!

Sex & Violence

HOW FAR IS TOO FAR?

SNEAK PREVIEWS!

Dark Earth, HyperBlade, Alien Alliance

HARDWARE!

BIG SCREENS & 3-D CARDS

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August 1996
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- Total Mayhem
- NHL Powerplay '96

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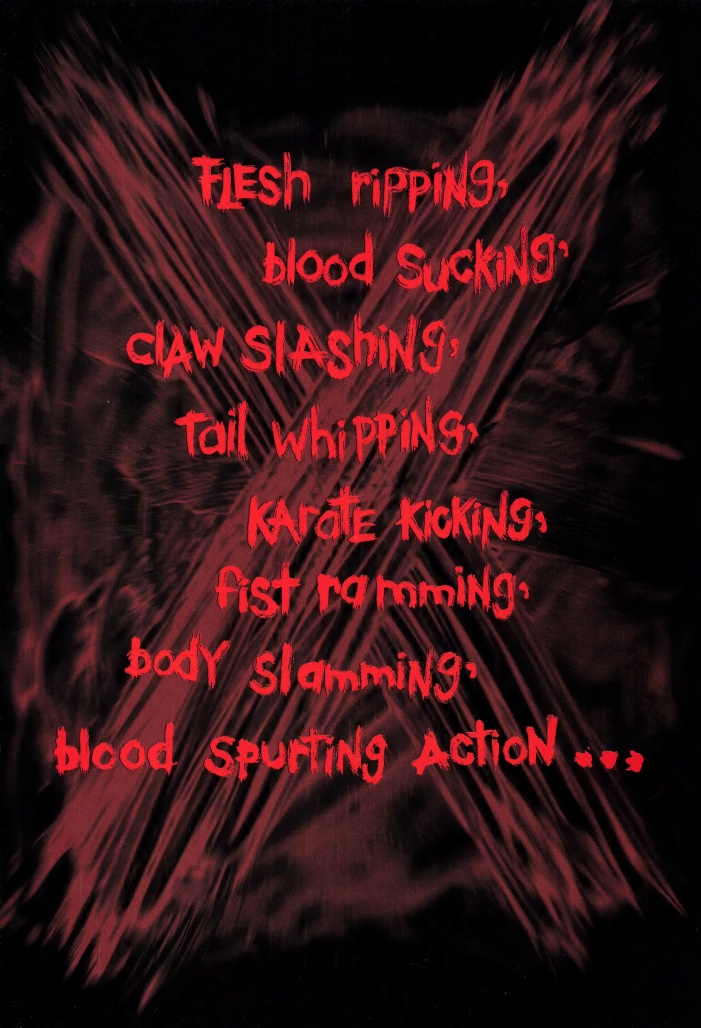
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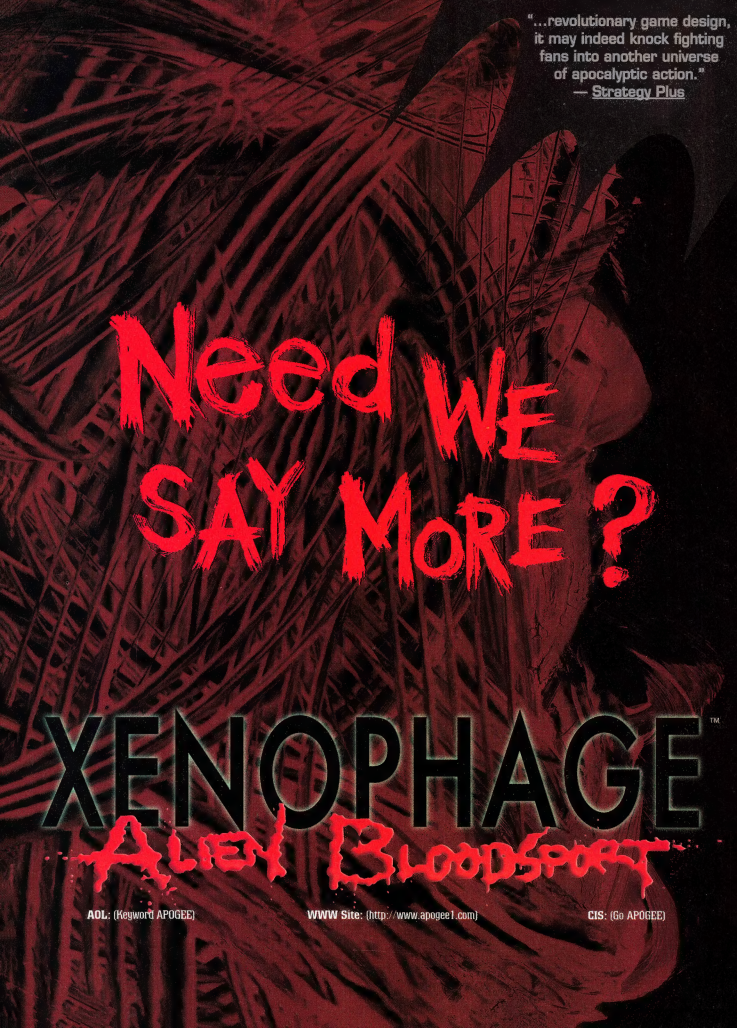
blood sucking,
CLAW SLASHING,
Tail whipping,
KARATE KICKING,
fist ramming,
body slamming,
blood spurting ACTION...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Each win allows you to advance to the next round.
Customize your matches with several different options, including fighter quickness, auto-blocking off/on, special moves toggle, and a dozen more.
Innovative screen p
real-time scaling, shad
like those only see
Lose and your homewo
Spine tingling music by Bobby Prince, (famous for **Duke Nukem 3D** and **DOOM**) with heart stopping sound and voice effects.
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e in the ultimate tournament.

If you are looking for something new and innovative in fighting games, you found it. Special never-before-seen moves, concussion causing combos, resurrections, & humiliations.

nning, zooming,
ows and special FX,
in the arcade.

Rip your friends apart with 2-player head-to-head action at the same computer. Even though one player games are awesome, nothing is more fun than pounding on a friend.

nia is destroyed. Survival is your only option!

Eight blood thirsty characters, two bone crushing champions and a nasty surprise that you will never be able to forget.

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— Strategy Plus

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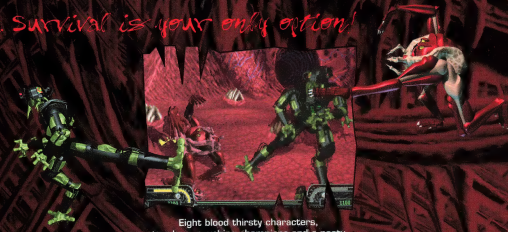

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AUGUST 1996

PC GAMES

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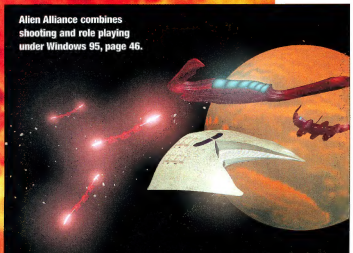

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How We Rate Games

PC Games uses a letter-grade system to rate games. Everyone who's gone to school knows what our grades mean without resorting to an in-depth explanation or clever chart, an A+ is the best score possible and an F is a complete bust. To give you a better feel for the overall quality of a title, we rate each game in five key areas.

Gameplay: How good are the game's interface and control scheme, and how much fun is it to play?
Getting Started: How much reading, studying, and hardware-tweaking are required before you can start to have fun? (The less the better.)
Graphics: How advanced and attractive are the game's visual elements, and how well do they match the game?
Sound Check: How good are the game's sound effects and musical score, and how well do they fit the game?
Overall Grade: Taking everything into account, how strongly do we recommend the game for purchase?

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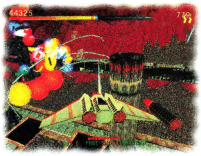
IT'S MORE THAN
A BATTLEGROUND.

IT'S A MIND FIELD.



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K-A
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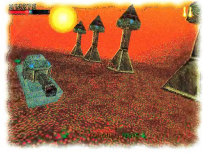

"Stellar!"

— Next Generation, March 1996

PC THAT'S NOT EXACTLY PC
STUDIO 3DO

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Editor's Page

Fredric Paul

More Is More, More or Less

Sore feet, bleary eyes, ringing ears, and a new appreciation for state-of-the-art computer games. That's what I left the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) with this year.

Unlike last year's debut, this show didn't have the excitement of validating an industry for the first time under the glare of Hollywood spotlights. What it did have was more—of everything. More booths, more products, and more attendees, not to mention more hype, more noise, and more walking.

So what did I see while trudging an estimated 114.3 miles around the Los Angeles Convention Center? Not quite what I expected. Quake didn't make its rumored appearance as a shipping product, and no one game stepped up to claim "Best of Show" honors. But plenty of games showed promise, from Bethesda Software's SkyNET to LucasArts' Dark Forces sequel, Jedi Knight. For an in-depth look at the coolest games previewed at the show—plus short takes on just about everything else—see "The 1996 E3 Top 25," features editor Christine Grech Wendin's show wrap-up on page 30.

Perhaps more important than the individual games, though, was the emergence of broad, inescapable trends. Online and Internet gaming were everywhere, despite a shortage of current players and an oversupply of technical problems. It's almost as if the game industry plans to simply *will* online gaming into The Next Big Thing. There seemed to be dozens of new online services yelling: "Hey, over here. Come play on my server!" If you were a game developer without plans to take your games online, well, you were in for a lot of ribbing at the after-hours parties.

Judging by the show floor, 3-D acceleration is *already* the standard. Just about every booth had a slick demo designed to make video gamers toss their consoles in favor of a PC. And yet most of the demos, from Intel's MMX technology to 3Dfx's Voodoo Graphics, were just that: demos, often running on prototype silicon.

Sure, 3-D acceleration makes PC games look better, but that's no guarantee that the boards and chips and technologies will go mainstream any time soon. Superior technology doesn't always win out, as the Betamax gathering dust in my closet sadly proves. (For a hands-on look at the first crop of 3-D cards, see Hardware Spotlight, page 90.)

You'll see more about the hot trends at the show in our Game News section (page 16), prepared by *PC Games*' new news editor, Willem Knibbe. But take everything you read with a few rocks of salt: many of the products introduced at last year's E3 still haven't seen the light of day, and you can bet that not every star of this year's show will hit store shelves on time, if at all.

But, hey—that's the fun of a young, growing industry still tripping over its own feet in its eagerness to come up with the next great game. I'll take the lofty aspirations, broken promises, and chaotic exuberance of the wild, woolly, and wide-open PC games industry over the overcontrolled tri-opoly of the video games business any day. Perhaps the biggest thing that E3 has showed over the past two years is that more and more gamers feel the same way.

FP

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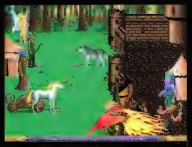
–Computer Gaming World

"Turn Based Strategy Game Of The Year"
–Computer Games Strategy Plus

[Great Year!]

[Great Game!]

Mythical creatures come to life as you battle for control of newly discovered lands in the award-winning strategy game *Heroes of Might and Magic*™. Explore virgin territory and capture strategic positions and resources while expanding your influence and establishing your dominance. Recruit your heroes, gather your armies, and challenge the other warlords for supremacy. Victory is within your reach if you have the brains and the brawn to take it.



- Over thirty unique combat units
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Spectacular web offer check out
http://www.nwcomputing.com

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CG RATED

PC GAMES On Disc

Demos of the Month

Top Gun: Fire at Will

Spectrum HoloByte, DOS

Silent Hunter

SSI, DOS

The U.S. Navy rules in the air and under the seat in Top Gun: Fire at Will, Spectrum HoloByte's easy-to-get-into flight sim based on the hit movie, you play Maverick, an ambitious new pilot strapped into the cockpit of a Navy F-14 Tomcat. Once you earn the Top Gun trophy, it's off to engage in international dogfights. Full-motion video adds excitement, advances the plot, and provides you with crucial information.

Top Gun: Fire at Will

Silent Hunter

Silent Hunter, Strategic Simulation's (SSI) slick new submarine sim, puts you in command of a U.S. Navy submarine leading an undersea campaign against the Japanese Imperial Navy in World War II. The gameplay focuses on tactics, not strategy, so you'll need to sink every enemy ship in sight. Rich, detailed graphics make it easy to get started, but your vessel has all the complex controls and attack procedures of a real U.S. Navy sub.

What's on the Disc?

Demos of the Month

Top Gun: Fire at Will (Spectrum HoloByte, DOS)
Silent Hunter (SSI, DOS)

Action Games

Earthworm Jim (Activision, Win 95)
Star Quest I in the 27th Century (Virtual Adventures, DOS)
Strife (Velocity, DOS)
Total Mayhem (Eidos Interactive, Win 95)

Action/Adventure Games

Time Commando (Activision, Win 3.1/Win 95)

Adventure Games

I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream (Cyberdreams, DOS)
Qin: Tomb of the Middle Kingdom (Time Warner Electronic Publishing, Win 3.1/Win 95)

Role-Playing Games

Albion (Blue Byte, Win 95)

Simulation Games

Savage (Discovery Multimedia, Win 95)

Strategy Games

Age of Rifles (SSI, DOS)
Allied General (SSI, DOS)
Deadline (Vic Tokai, DOS)
Deadlock (Accolade, DOS/Win 95)
Fantasy General (SSI, DOS)

Getting Started

Win 3.1

1. Start Windows and insert the CD-ROM in the disc drive.
2. Select Run from the Program Manager's File menu.
3. Type "d:\install" in the Command Line box and press Enter.
4. Follow onscreen instructions.

Win 95

1. Insert the CD-ROM in the disc drive.
2. Wait a few seconds and follow onscreen instructions.

Getting Around

Click on the *PC Games* icon to load the CD-ROM. The Welcome screen lists each game demo and what platform it runs on. Click on the disclaimer button to read all the legal mumbo jumbo.

Click anywhere else on the Welcome screen to bring up the Main screen. You can explore any of the 16 Hot Demos by clicking on the picture of the game you want to try, or click the yellow arrows on the left and right sides of the demo screen to scroll through your choices.

Each game icon brings up a description of the game and a list of the minimum system requirements. On some demos (mostly in Windows and Windows 95), you can simply click the Play button to begin playing the game. On others, click the Install button to put the game on your hard drive. In some cases, you'll have to go to DOS to complete the installation.

You can also navigate through the demos using the buttons on the gray task bar on the left side of the screen. The task bar offers access to the other parts of the disc as well, including a special subscription offer; Express Yourself, a comments area; America Online; and the Buyer's Hotline, a listing of toll-free numbers for getting more information about your favorite games.

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Letters

Question of the Month:
Windows 95—Gaming Bane or Boon?

Do you use Win 95? Do you play Win 95 games? Game developers love it because it shifts support obligations to Microsoft, but how do *you* feel about it? Let us know your opinions on Bill Gates' baby (the software one) and how it affects the games you play by writing to us at Letters to the Editors, PC Games, 951 Mariners Island Blvd., Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; faxing us at 415-349-7482; or e-mailing us at pcgamesletters@iftw.com.

What About Games?

Will the Telecommunications Act affect any games that you can find online? How about the games you can purchase in stores?

crashoveride@talk.net

The Telecommunications Act shouldn't affect the games you buy in stores, but it could potentially limit the content of online games. For more on the role of sex and violence in games, see "Sex and Violence '96," page 38. —Ed.

ATF vs. EF2000

I love your magazine and I don't miss an issue, but the real reason I am writing is to comment on your review of Electronic Arts' Advanced Tactical Fighters (ATF). I recently purchased this product, as I am an avid flight-sim jock. I've always enjoyed U.S. Navy Fighters (USNF) and Marine Fighters, but I guess I expected a little more from EA's new Jane's Series. It seems EA could have added some more flash to separate its older Air Combat Series from the new Jane's flight sims.

As far as your comment "The latest aeronautic technology sets ATF apart from the flight-sim crowd," you might want to re-check EF2000 with the bug fix. I think that Oceans' virtual cockpit and terrain graphics give ATF a run for its money. Sure, EF2000 doesn't have a cool intro or multiplayer capabilities, but the game is solid, and a true representation of a flight sim. For me, the USNF and ATF windows remove from the reality factor; I don't feel I'm in a jet. If somebody could just combine the strengths of both games…

Paul Bourque
p_bourqu@fox.nstn.ca

We received a range of answers to our question of the month from June 1996: Do you think sex and violence have a place in computer games?

Most PC and video games are used by the teen or pre-teen community. While I see the need for some violence in games, I see no need for sex. Our young are exposed to far too much sex in television, movies, and video. I don't endorse sex in games. They should be just as they are—games.

Jim Juneau
jjuneau@juno.com

In a perfect world it wouldn't matter. We'd be focusing our energies on world peace, abolition of poverty, and solutions to world hunger. But in the real world, people are influenced by negative images of sex and violence. Most of us can separate a gaming experience from real life, but some can't.

Roger Bigney
RBigney@aol.com

Let's face it: sex and violence sell. I believe they have a place in the computer game market—just look at the expanding market in X-rated CD-ROMs—and should be used. But only with extreme care and with parental overrides and lockouts.

W. Riffkin
wmrfamily@aol.com

I believe that sex and violence have their place in computer games, even if there has been too much of them lately. Take Doom and its clones, for example. If you take out the blood and guts, what do you have? A man walking around a maze trying to find an exit. I am not against violence in games. Sometimes it's necessary to propel the plot in games such as Full Throttle and Warcraft.

As for sex, this is a stupid thing to put on a CD. If you want to see a naked woman, buy a magazine or rent a movie.

Kyle Hall
Atlantic, PA

Dig It Up

I just started reading your magazine and I love it. I also just got The Dig. It's a fabulous game. However, though I saw some advertisements in your May issue, I saw no hints or review. You may have reviewed the game in an earlier issue that I missed. If so, how can I get a hold of that issue?

David Blackmer
l8burd@aol.com

*We reviewed The Dig (complete with tips) back in February (*PC Entertainment, *page 66). You can order a back issue by calling 800-360-2228, or check out our Web site at* www.pcgamesmag.com. *—Ed.*

Microsoft Headaches

Why do Microsoft products always change my computer configuration? For example, when I installed Return of Arcade, the system automatically "sensed" my peripherals and changed the video driver. I then had to restart Windows 95 to complete the installation. When the system was back up, there was a message that the video driver was not compatible with my components. Isn't it supposed to be plug-and-play?

Also, why are there no Windows games that act like DOS games—install easily and set up the appropriate subdirectories? If you want to delete a DOS game, you just issue "deltree dir_name" and the game is gone. In Windows, there are always scattered files all over the disk. Unless you have an uninstall program it's a nightmare to uninstall a Windows program.

Juan C. Zayas
Caguas, PR

Stay tuned for responses to our Question of the Month. —Ed.

Measuring Up

I would first like to say how great your new design is. I particularly like the new letter

continued on page 12

ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL WILEY

You blasted your way through an onslaught of undead marines and hell-spawned hordes in Doom, Ultimate Doom and Doom II. Now you can retire, right? Wrong.

Seems flesh-eating mutants have the mortality rate of a cockroach and are alive and kicking in Final Doom – the last of the legendary Doom products. It's two new 32-level episodes complete with new stories (Evilution & The Plutonia Experiment), new frighteningly realistic graphics and new pulse-pounding music. It's time to finish what you started.

OLD SOLDIERS NEVER DIE,
THEY JUST TURN INTO
BLOODTHIRSTY
MUTANT ZOMBIES

5.56

FINAL DOOM

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It's an interactive world, and *PC Games* is right there online to bring you everything you want to know about games: what's new; what's hot; where to find the best cheats, hints, and tips; and how to get the best shareware downloads! You'll never have to go anywhere else for gaming information. Just point your browser to **www.pcgamesmag.com** for the most up-to-date info, including:

- News on upcoming game releases
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- Links to the best gaming resources on the Internet
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And much more!

Highlights of the Month

Duke Nukem 3D: The PC Games Online-Only Guided Tour!!

Your verdict is already clear: Duke Nukem 3D is the most popular and exciting game so far this year. And at 28 levels, it's *humongous*. So PC Games Online is serving up a walk-through of the hot spots in every level, from the messed-up ride on the rooftop to the final confrontation in the stadium with…well, you'll see. We haven't stopped there: you'll also get a slew of tips and strategies for dominating multiplayer games…and it's only at www.pcgamesmag.com!

More From This Year's Electronic Entertainment Expo

Speaking of huge, the amount of PC games previewed at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) was simply staggering. You'd need three magazines to fit it all…or maybe just this expanded look on PC Games Online. Here's the inside dope on all the games you'll be playing next.

Alien Alliance: The Expanded Guided Tour

You might call this game the "thinking man's space shooter." With role-playing elements added to the action, Orbital Studios' Windows 95 epic brings a little more to the gaming mix. After you take the magazine's Guided Tour (page 42), check out PC Games Online for even more Alien Alliance.

LETTERS, *continued from page 10*

grading system. I was also curious about your Guided Tour on Diablo. Is Diablo going to be much like Ultima VIII? Could you compare them to give me an idea of how Diablo stacks up?

Garth Brazelton
South Bend, IN

Glad you like our new look! As for how much Diablo is going to resemble Ultima VIII, we'd have to say not very much. While they share similar playing perspectives, Ultima VIII is much more of a classic role-playing game. Diablo is essentially non-linear and its levels are different every time you play, providing a range of experiences. The emphasis in Diablo is more on combat, strategy, and building up your character than on traveling from place to place gleaning story information and solving puzzles.
—Ed.

SimCampaign

I am searching for a computer game that simulates political campaigns. Specifically, I'm looking for a game that puts the player in a position to make decisions about advertising spending, where to send the candidate, when to debate, and other issues that impact political campaigns. Can you help?

Dan Prince
DSLPrince@aol.com,internet

Check out The Doonesbury Election Game: Campaign '96 from Mindscape. Despite the presence of the Doonesbury characters (and some PC Games *staffers in uncredited cameos), the Election Game accurately simulates the duties and activities of a real election. (For a review, see* PC Entertainment, *February 1996, page 86, or check out our Web site.)* *—Ed.*

Command and Conquer

Do you know when C&C: Red Alert and C&C: Tiberium Sun are coming out?

Joseph Callaco
pcallaco@ix.netcom.com

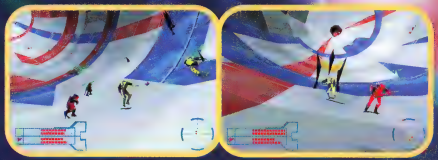
Red Alert is scheduled to hit store shelves this fall. Tiberium Sun is slated for next year. —Ed

Whoops

The service rate for Mplayer will be in the $2.00-per-hour range, not $12.50 per hour as we reported in "Games Get Connected" (June 1996, page 50).

In the June Table of Contents we mislabeled a picture of Flying Nightmares 2 as Jedi Knight: Dark Forces 2. ■

The sport of the future:
Part extreme skating.
Part hockey.
Part manslaughter.



HyperBlade is compatible with many 3-D accelerator cards.

HYPER BLADE

The airborne stunts of extreme skating. The brutal velocity of hockey. The lethal consequences of manslaughter. HyperBlade isn't just a multi-player sports game, it's a game of survival. Because if the speed doesn't kill you, your opponent will.

The Drome Opens Fall '96.
Available on MS-DOS®/Windows®95 CD-ROM.

Check Out the Pre-Game Action at
http://www.activision.com.

ACTIVISION®

WIZ BANG! Developed by Wizbang! in collaboration with Activision.

Activision is a registered trademark and HyperBlade is a trademark of Activision, Inc. ©1996 Activision, Inc. Wizbang! is a registered trademark of Wizbang. Sculptured Productions, Inc. All other trademarks and trade names are the properties of their respective owners. All rights reserved.

ANDERSON,

I NEED A VOLUNTEER.

THAT TANK UP THE ROAD? SOMEONE'S GOTTA TAKE IT OUT.

I NEED SOMEONE I CAN COUNT ON. SOMEONE WHO'S MAN ENOUGH TO RUN THROUGH MACHINE GUN FIRE TO GET THE JOB DONE.

AND ANDERSON, THERE COULD BE A MEDAL IN IT FOR YA.

Anderson, Chuck. Sergeant. Leads 2nd Platoon's Recon team. Probably gotta wife back home. Damn good soldier. You give him an order and he figures out the best way to get the job done. So what's he doing cowering behind that bombed-out farmhouse?

Saving his own butt.

That's what you should expect if you order him to do something crazy. In Close Combat everything reacts like it does on the battlefield, from the ripping canvas hiss of the German MG42 machine gun to the screams of the men it hits. It all goes down right in front of you. In real time.

Americans vs. Germans: Which side you gonna take?

So there's no time to thumb through the manual. You work your mouse like a weapon. Point and click and *boom*, the shooting starts the second your men step off Omaha Beach and it don't let up 'til they've taken Saint-Lô. Troops, terrain, situations — if you want to get any more accurate, you'll have to shave your head.

Mac™ vs. Windows® 95: Which side you gonna take?

Wanna go head to head with other military geniuses? All you need is a TCP/IP connection. And guts.

To experience Close Combat visit your nearest recruiter or head straight for the battlefield at **http://www.microsoft.com/games/kickbutt/**

Download the trial version and start your basic training today.

Microsoft

WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO TODAY?™

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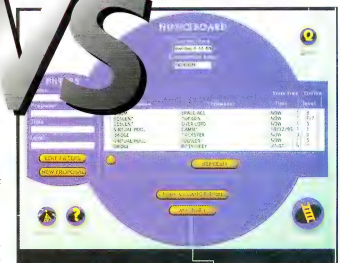


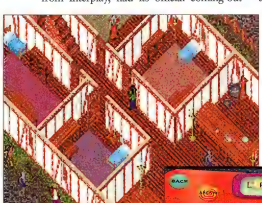
MCI's Wireplay is jumping to our side of the ocean.

Global Gaming

Between all the companies announcing new or upgraded online gaming services and all the vendors promising to bring their games online, the recent Electronic Entertainment Expo almost seemed like Internet World.

Here's a quick run-down on some of the online gaming developments coming out of E3:

• **Engage Games Online**, the new Windows 95 online gaming service spinoff from Interplay, had its official coming-out party. The service is due on America Online and Prodigy this summer, and Engage also signed a deal for Time Warner Cable's Full Service Network interactive TV trials. Direct Internet access is scheduled to follow soon.



Ultima Online is in beta testing and should be ready for role players this fall.

The service's initial game lineup includes Warcraft II (exclusive to Engage), Descent Online, BattleChess 4000, Castles II, Shattered Steel, Advanced Dungeons and Dragons, SlipStream 5000, SimCity 2000, Fighter Duel, The Improvisation Online, and MUD II, among others. Engage has also signed an exclusive deal with Interworld for original online games. The first two offerings will be Rolemaster: Magestorm (a role-playing game of capture-the-flag) and Splatterball (a virtual version of paintball).

• **MCI Wireplay**, already up and running in the United Kingdom, will cross the pond to the U.S. this fall. Developed by British Telecom and tested by 1,700 British beta users, the service offers real-time Internet play with most off-the-shelf multiplayer games including Doom and Descent. MCI will distribute the Wireplay software online free at www.mci.com and www.wireplay.com, as well as through direct mail and with MCI bills. The service will use MCI's network to create a dedicated gaming network that offers action games without latency problems, MCI says.

• **Genie Interactive**, a new venture of Genie and Internet service provider IDT, plans to eliminate hourly fees for game players. Free for the first three months and $10 per month after that, Genie Interactive will offer via Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer "a comprehensive menu of…challenging multiplayer games" developed by Israeli publisher 2AM. The beta version should be available now at www.village.genie.com.

Mplayer will use Voxware technology to let gamers talk to each other.

Cruise the track with 15 other drivers in the NASCAR Racing League.

• **Catapult Entertainment** has added MechWarrior 2 and Warcraft, which will be included on the free XBand CD, to its lineup. The XBand service is now in beta and goes live this summer.

• **Mpath Interactive**, a new Internet gaming service also due this summer, released its initial lineup. The Mplayer service will feature Command & Conquer, Warcraft, Terminal Velocity, Chaos Overlords, Deadlock, and Havoc.

• **Origin Systems** showed an alpha version of Ultima Online and is aiming for a fall release to the Net, says Origin vice president Richard "Lord British" Garriott.

• **Sierra On-Line** and its subsidiary, Papyrus Design, announced the NASCAR Racing League, which will let wanna-be stock car drivers dial into a network to play the PC version of NASCAR Racing II against as many as 15 other drivers. Engines start concurrently with the PC title's fall release.

If gaming is truly to be the Internet's "killer application," these services will have to turn their promises of quick matchmaking and latency-free play into reality. While some of the online games and services may do well, you can bet that for many, the optimistic announcements at E3 will turn out to be as close to success as they ever come.

—Fredric Paul and Donald St. John

For more about online gaming, see "Games Get Connected," June 1996, page 46, or check PC Games Online at www.pcgamesmag.com.

Microsoft Winds Up PC Game Pad

After seeing success in the joystick market with the Sidewinder 3D and 3D Pro joysticks, Microsoft will debut its Microsoft Sidewinder Game Pad this Halloween. Designed for sports and fighting games, the PlayStation-style controller has an eight-direction D-Pad, six buttons (A, B, C, X, Y, Z), and two triggers.

Emphasizing easy connections, the $39 Sidewinder Game Pad lets you daisy-chain up to four controllers for multiplayer action using Windows 95 digital technology that's similar to the Gravis GRiP system. You can also plug your Sidewinder 3D Pro into the Game Pad so you don't have to crawl behind your PC—or reboot it—to switch controllers.

In a boon to fighting-game fans and aging gamers with slower thumbs, the Sidewinder Game Pad uses software to let you program multibutton combinations into single button presses. You simply record a combo and attach it to one of the six buttons or two triggers.

You can daisy-chain up to four Sidewinder Game Pads.

Microsoft, with its new attention to games, is likely not done in the controller arena. A force-feedback joystick will emerge from the company's recent purchase of Exos, but don't hold your breath. Microsoft says it's at least a year away. (Microsoft; 800-426-9400; $39) *—Fredric Paul*

So Long, Spectrum

Quick–who publishes Falcon, Top Gun, Tetris, and Star Trek: The Next Generation? Nope, it's not Spectrum HoloByte. Not anymore. The company has announced a new strategy that puts all Spectrum games under the MicroProse moniker and narrows its focus to three genres.

"We looked closely at each company's product line and thought it was clear which one was stronger," says Stephen Race, CEO of MicroProse. "We've always been marketed as a single brand in Europe, so it made sense to be a single brand in the U.S." The first former Spectrum PC game to be released under the MicroProse label is Grand Prix II, due this summer.

MicroProse—that's right, MicroProse—will ship Falcon 4.0 in the first half of 1997.

Spectrum, which acquired MicroProse in 1993, will retain its corporate name for the time being. The company hopes its MicroProse branding strategy will help gamers and retailers recognize its products. According to research firm PC Data, combining the labels makes MicroProse fourth in U.S. sales of PC entertainment software. It should also help deflect negative attention on Spectrum, which has been late with several key products and posted a net loss of $39.8 million for fiscal 1996.

However, Race admits the single-brand focus may ruffle some gamers' feathers in the short term. "Falcon being sold under the MicroProse name is a lot like Ford making a Camaro," he acknowledges. "No doubt it's like heresy to loyal Falcon players."

To help ensure that all of its games provide a quality playing experience, the company will now focus on producing titles in just three game genres: sims, strategy, and 3-D action/adventure. "We're walking away from some of our heritage, such as puzzle games, which may seem strange, as [Spectrum] was built on Tetris," says Race. MicroProse has also walked away from OverTime Sports.

The new branding strategy and narrowed focus won't affect ship dates, Race claims. MicroProse is planning to release the highly anticipated (and much-delayed) Magic: The Gathering in late summer, Master of Orion II: Battle at Antares this summer, and Star Trek: Generations in time for the holidays.

The recent changes did force a consolidation of marketing and customer service efforts. About 30 full-time employees were laid off at MicroProse's Hunt Valley, Md., facility as marketing and customer-services offices were brought to the Spectrum offices in Alameda, Calif. "We're now a studio-based company," says Holly Hartz, vice president of marketing. "It didn't make sense to have two different marketing and customer service departments. We've been operating as two companies for too long. We probably should have done this awhile ago."

–Steve Klett and Willem Knibbe

scouting REPORT

Tracking Quake

The outfit responsible for Logitech's Wingman Warrior, a joystick designed to improve play on such first-person shooters as Duke Nukem 3D, Doom, and Quake, has a new design up its sleeve. First-Person Gaming's **Assassin** is a trackball add-on that connects between a traditional joystick and the game port. Players can use it to change viewing and movement directions in first-person shooting games, and it's a convenient way to control what you see in flight sims. As an added benefit, the Assassin converts just about any joystick from analog to digital operation. First-Person Gaming is looking for a manufacturer to build and sell the device. (First-Person Gaming, 510-264-9577)

Checkmate

Chessmaster 5000 hits the Web for free play via a new Mindscape Chess Server that's able to handle hundreds of games at once. Log onto Mindscape's Web site (**www.mindscape.com**) to download the free Chessmaster Network Connection Kit, which includes a special browser that lets you go head-to-head with other players. There's even an audio link for players who have microphones. (Mindscape; 800-234-3088)

Games Go Hollywood

You've heard the old saying about life imitating art. Well, how about art imitating art? There are reportedly offers to do **Duke Nukem 3D** books and movies, and Activision just announced that The Rothman Agency is looking to make Pitfall into an animated TV show.

Brain-Drain fans won't be left out, either. Berkeley Systems' popular You Don't Know Jack multiplayer trivia game will be on a TV screen near you this fall. Telepictures Productions will make this twisted spoof of a game show a reality with a Warner Bros.

continued on page 18

scouting REPORT

syndicated show of the same name. Around the same time, Berkeley will release Volume 2 of You Don't Know Jack, chock full of 800 brand-new questions and celebrity guest appearances. A sports version of the game is also on the way.

Make Your Own Big Top

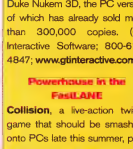
Maxis is teaming up with Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey to create **SimCircus**, a simulation of the Greatest Show on Earth. It is scheduled for a 1997 release. (Maxis; 800-526-2947; **www.maxis.com**)

GT Wins Dukestakes

GT Interactive Software is becoming the primary distributor for first-person 3-D shooters. The company, which already has Hexen, Doom II, and overseas distribution rights to Quake in its stable, recently secured the distribution rights for all versions of 3D Realms' **Duke Nukem Forever** and **Prey**. GT will also distribute the console versions of Duke Nukem 3D, the PC version of which has already sold more than 300,000 copies. (GT Interactive Software; 800-610-4847; **www.gtinteractive.com**)

Powerhouse in the FastLANE

Collision, a live-action twitch game that should be smashing onto PCs late this summer, puts



you behind the wheel in a post-apocalyptic world. Gamers will have to drive and shoot their way out of a desolate desert city inhabited by the evil Spine and his drones. If the developer's FastLANE technology delivers

continued on page 20

Power Play

Serious gamers don't have to play their favorites on some business-oriented machine designed for spreadsheets and word processors anymore. A number of PC makers, including NEC, Compaq, IBM, and AST, are working on high-powered systems designed expressly to meet gamers' needs. These systems won't be cheap, but if you've got the cash, they've got everything you need for today's top game-playing experience, including bundles of the latest-and-greatest games, not just last year's shovelware. And because everything comes in a single package, you won't have to be a hardware genius to get it all working.

NEC helped legitimize game PCs last year by quickly selling out of its Ready PowerPlayer LE, and the company's 1996 entry sets a new standard. The first product of a new division founded solely to produce gaming machines, The PowerPlayer 2001 (the "Ready" has been dropped) will come with just about everything you need for robust gaming. Most notable is 5MB of base video RAM and not one but two 3-D graphics accelerators: an ATI 3D Rage graphics controller with another 2MB of RAM and a 3Dfx Voodoo Graphics card. The Rage offers compatibility with a large selection of games, while the 3Dfx card delivers the best performance available. You also get two top-of-the-line game controllers: a Thrustmaster Mark III flight-control system and a Gravis GrIP system. And NEC swears that its CD-ROM changer will let you play multidisc games without swapping discs.

Top PC vendor Compaq is expected to announce its top-of-the-line Presario 8710, which is intended to go head-to-head with gaming consoles thanks to its NEC/Videologic PowerVR 3-D technology. Other models in the 8000 series are expected to have slightly slower CPUs and less RAM. Look for Compaq's cheaper home and family machines to use S3's ViRGE 3D acceleration chip and include a gamepad.

NEC's PowerPlayer 2001 will offer a true gaming experience.

Last year IBM sold around 500 Ultimate Game Machines, and this year Big Blue plans to address the gaming market with special Aptivas. The units' standard features will include six- and eight-speed CD-ROM drives and IBM's own MWave multifunction boards with MPEG acceleration. Some high-end Aptivas will have ATI's 3D Rage chip, a new IBM-brand joystick similar to Microsoft's Sidewinder 3D Pro, and 30-watt IBM speakers based on JBL technology and equipped with a subwoofer. Later in the year, the company will unveil a new industrial design for the Aptiva.

AST is still working on final specifications for its game machine, partly because the company isn't yet convinced it can sell a $3,000 box on game appeal alone. Nevertheless, the yet-to-be-named system will include a pair of 3-D solutions, one on the motherboard and one on an add-on card.

Whether or not you buy one of these power-gamer machines, they're great news for all. They help bring gaming technology into the computing mainstream, which raises volume and lowers costs. That means the fancy gadgets found on these high-end boxes this year will likely show up on all PCs next year.

—Fredric Paul

NEC PowerPlayer 2001/2000

Processor: P200/P166 with 256K pipeline burst cache
RAM: 32MB
Hard drive: 3.2GB
Graphics: ATI 3D Rage with 2MB RAM
3D: 3Dfx Voodoo Graphics
Sound: 16-bit wavetable sound, 50-watt Advent speakers with subwoofer
Modem: 33.6Kbps with DSVD
Controller: Thrustmaster Mark III FCS and Gravis GrIP system
Price: $3,499/$2,999 (without monitor)
800-632-4636, www.nec.com

AST

Processor: P200
RAM: 32MB
Hard drive: 3GB
Graphics: 2MB RAM
3D: Chip and board solutions
Sound: Altec-Lansing AS 400 speakers with subwoofer
Modem: 28.8Kbps with DSVD
Controller: Joystick
Price: Less than $3,000 (without monitor)
800-876-4278, www.ast.com

IBM Aptiva

Processor: P166 and up
RAM: 16MB and up
Hard drive: Variable
Graphics/3D: ATI 3D Rage
Sound: IBM MWave multifunction card, 30-watt speakers with optimal subwoofer
Modem: 28.8Kbps
Controller: IBM joystick
Price: $2,000 and up (without monitor)
800-765-4426, www.ibm.com

Compaq Presario 8710 *

Processor: P200
RAM: 32MB EDO RAM with 256K pipeline burst cache
Hard drive: 2.5GB
Graphics: 64-bit with 4MB RAM
3D: PowerVR with 2MB RAM
Sound: AMD Interwave wavetable sound with 512KB RAM, JBL Pro Premium speakers with subwoofer
Modem: 33Kbps w/ DSVD
Controller: Thrustmaster Advanced Gamepad
Price: Approximately $3,500 (without monitor)
800-345-1518, www.compaq.com
* Anticipated

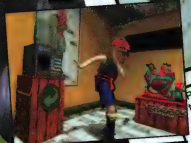
NORMALITY

Because No One Should Have A Thought Of Their Own.

WANTED

This first person adventure comes with its own hilarious "Voodoo Doll" interface

Raft, climb, wander and scour over 120 True 3D locations



Wildly twisted puzzles offering hours of raging 3D adventures

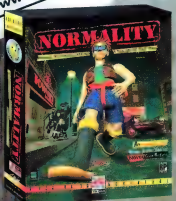
Protecting the Normal Community

NORMALITY POLICE

District #13

Suspect Name: "Kent"	Last seen terrorizing this innocent group of teenagers during a nice, normal game of shuffleboard. He is extremely abnormal and no attempt should be made to subdue the suspect. If you see him, contact the Norm Police immediately and run far away, it could get ugly.
Sex: male	
Height: 5' 9"	
Weight: 157 lbs	
Eyes: Under Sunglasses	
Hair: Fleming Red	
Age: 20-Something	

The Normality Police Can Be Contacted At: **http://www.interplay.com**



MS DOS

Gremlin Interactive

Interplay

BY GAMERS FOR GAMERS

NYP2

©1996 Gremlin Interactive Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Normality is a trademark of Interplay Productions. All rights reserved. Interplay is the sole publisher and distributor. Licensed from and developed by Gremlin Interactive, Ltd.

scouting REPORT

on its promise to let players cut to new video clips without delay, this arcade-style shooter could cause a resurgence in full-motion video for games. (Powerhouse Entertainment; 214-233-5400; Win 95 CD; $54)

3DO Tries PCs

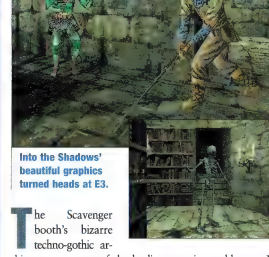
The 3DO Multiplayer may not have succeeded as a game machine, but The 3DO Company is trying to revive its fortunes in the PC market. The Studio 3DO software division will lead the effort by releasing ports of existing 3DO games. First out of the chute this summer will be **Star Fighter**, a 3-D flight strategy game. Other ports to follow include **BladeForce**, **SnowJob**, **BattleSport**, and **Captain Quazar**. 3DO says the new PC versions will be "heightened" compared to the originals, and many will be distributed by Acclaim Entertainment.

Besides porting existing titles, 3DO will be developing brand-new games exclusively for the PC. Look for a new golf sim starring John Daly, plus **3DO Games: Decathlon**, a 10-event track-and-field game. Finally, 3DO has signed an agreement with chipmaker Cirrus Logic to bring 3DO's next-generation M2 technology to PC graphics-accelerator cards. (3DO; 800-336-3506; **www.3do.com**)

Real-Time Trash Talking

DTC Data Technology is prepping for online gaming with its **DTC Collaborator**. This 28.8 V.34 DSVD fax modem lets you talk trash while playing your pal in an online game. For $199, you get the modem, video-conferencing software, Netscape with Netcom Internet access, Cheyenne BitWare, and 10 shareware games. (DTC Data Technology; 408-942-4000; **www.datatechnology.com**)

Scavenging for the New id-on-the-Block



Into the Shadows' beautiful graphics turned heads at E3.

The Scavenger booth's bizarre techno-gothic architecture was one of the leading attention-grabbers at E3. And inside, Scavenger's Into the Shadows combat/role-playing game conjured up graphics even more lush and compelling than what's been seen of Quake. And, like Quake developer id Software, some of Scavenger's games are being handled by distribution giant GT Interactive.

Unlike id, though, Scavenger shows no qualms about developing lots of titles at once. Into the Shadows is just one of 11 games that the company plans to ship in the next year, turning Scavenger into a midsize publisher practically overnight. Just where did these guys come from?

Scavenger describes itself as a band of like-minded artists with development offices in England, Denmark, Sweden, and the United States. While unheralded, Scavenger has been around for a respectable four years, developing video games and quietly winning awards for design from companies like Sega (for Red Zone).

Into the Shadows could put Scavenger on the cusp of id-like success. It's a Dungeons and Dragons–type adventure that combines real-time combat with role-playing elements and sets it all in one of the best-looking 3-D environments ever seen on a PC. Some observers had trouble believing the demos weren't already exploiting the latest in high-powered 3-D graphics cards. They weren't, but the next version of the game will. Scavenger credits "nurb interpolated volume rendering," a technology it started developing four years ago for Into the Shadows' stunning look.

Gamers less inclined to combat can look forward to Gemini, a space colonization game where it's up to you to build a space station capable of monitoring the evacuation of Earth. And yes, you still get awesome 3-D graphics. Expect Into the Shadows by Christmas, while Gemini is due early next year. (Scavenger; 213-651-9332) —*David Gerding*

LEADER BOARD

The best-selling PC games and our editors' recommendations

RATING	TITLE	LAST MONTH	MONTHS ON CHART	OUR RATING
1	**Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness** (Blizzard Entertainment; 800-953-7669; DOS CD; $50)	1	5	A
2	**Civilization II** (MicroProse; 800-879-7529; DOS CD; $49.99)	2	1	A
3	**Myst** (Braderbund; 800-521-6263; Win CD; $54.95)	3	24	A
4	**Descent II** (Interplay; 800-969-4263; DOS CD; $49.95)	4	2	B+
5	**Microsoft Flight Simulator 5.1** (Microsoft; 800-426-9400; DOS, DOS CD; $59.95)	9	9	B
6	**Command & Conquer** (Virgin Interactive Entertainment; 800-874-4607; DOS CD; $59.95)	7	6	C
7	**Advanced Tactical Fighters** (Electronic Arts; 800-245-4525; DOS CD; $59.95)	–	1	B+
8	**MechWarrior 2** (Activision; 800-477-3650; DOS CD; $59.95)	8	8	A-
9	**The Ultimate Doom: Thy Flesh Consumed** (GT Interactive; 800-610-4847; DOS CD; $30)	–	8	–
10	**Zork: Nemesis** (Activision; 800-477-3650; DOS/Win 95 CD; $49.95)	–	1	A

Leader Board is a compilation of top-selling computer games in 1,200 retail stores for April 1996. "Months On Chart" does not necessarily indicate consecutive months. Source: PC Data

Our Editors Recommend

TITLE	OUR RATING
Duke Nukem 3D (FormGen; 800-263-2390; DOS CD; $39.99)	A
Jane's AH-64D Longbow (Jane's Combat Simulations; 800-245-4525; DOS CD; $64.95)	A-
MissionForce: Cyberstorm (Sierra On-Line; 800-757-7707; Win/Win 95 CD; $59.95)	A-
Terra Nova (Virgin Interactive Entertainment; 800-874-4607; DOS CD; $59.95)	A-
Warcraft II: Beyond the Dark Portal (Blizzard Entertainment; 800-953-7669; DOS CD; $30)	A

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Steve Klett

A Brand Apart

Can you imagine a day when you stroll into your local software store to browse for a new title from your favorite developer, much like you do today for a new music CD from your favorite band?

That's the scene many game companies are starting to envision. Why? The concept of branding—giving products a name and logo that are synonymous with quality (and fun)—is being embraced as a way to stand out among the scads of titles crowding store shelves.

The branding issue rang out loud and clear to The Player as he strode through the throngs of game developers, marketing types, salespeople, and retailers crowding the recent Electronic Entertainment Expo in L.A. Nearly every one of the dozens of companies The Player spoke with conveyed concerns about how they were going to make their titles visible during the crucial holiday buying period. (Hey, how 'bout releasing more titles during the slow summer months, folks?)

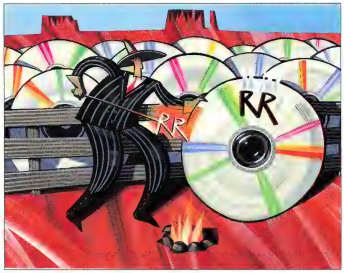


ILLUSTRATION BY ROB BARBER

It's not just an academic concern. Nearly every major company had a quality title or two that didn't sell as well as expected last Christmas—Virgin's Zone Raiders, Electronic Arts' Fade To Black, I-Magic's Star Rangers. Many think branding is the answer.

The issue really is quality. Put out enough terrific games under a specific brand name and you could have a winning formula.

Virgin Interactive Entertainment, for instance, has launched a brand name, Burst, for the products it develops in house. While striving to separate Virgin-developed games from the slew of third-party titles the company publishes, Virgin hopes to convince people that the Burst name alone is reason enough to buy a game—even if they've never heard of the particular title.

And Virgin's not alone. Electronic Arts is attempting to do the same thing through its various brands: Jane's, EA Sports, Bullfrog, etc. (Hmm. EA may have stepped over the line into brand overkill.) Spectrum and MicroProse have united under the MicroProse name because company officials think a single brand name will be less confusing (see "So Long, Spectrum," page 17). And Mindscape recently launched its Sports Authority brand (see "Mindscape Sports Authority," July 1996, page 18).

Making a name for yourself to get noticed on crowded shelves is not the only problem facing game companies. The status quo for what passes as a quality title has risen considerably in the last year. Without first-rate Super VGA graphics and a cutting-edge soundtrack, a game's chances of success range from slim to none. And while good graphics and sound alone may be enough to persuade a gamer to fork over his $50, if gameplay isn't intriguing or inventive, the game is likely to be returned in a few days. Given today's hyper-competitive market, there's no reason for anyone to put up with a mediocre product.

And the issue really is quality. Put out enough terrific games under a specific brand name and you could have a winning formula. But simply putting the Burst logo on a box is not enough. After all, when you cruise into a record store looking for a new music CD, you don't look for the Atlantic label, you look for the name of a band you like. And I don't know about you, but I'm much more likely to make a spontaneous purchase of a $15 music disc than a $50 game, even if it does say Bullfrog on it.

The good news for gamers—and music to The Player's ears—is that companies are finally getting the message. Companies famous for pumping out a horrendous number of games each year simply to meet quotas (a practice that eventually catches up to them—just ask MicroProse) appear to be tailing back their efforts. Instead, many vendors are focusing on fewer titles, while making sure that each of the remaining offerings has extremely high production and gameplay values and the marketing needed to have a chance of success.

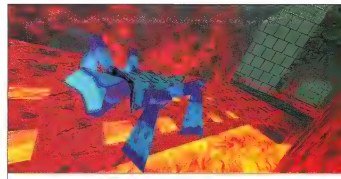
Rest assured, fellow players, this holiday season will present a virtual smorgasbord of first-rate gaming experiences. The only question is whether the spread will be as palatable to game publishers.

As always, The Player welcomes your feedback, input, questions, concerns, and Duke Deathmatch challenges at Sklett@iftw.com.

Peter Olafson

The Learning Game

Mendel is...well, who knows exactly what he is. He looks like a "cootie"—one of those multi-segmented, insect-like plastic creatures you may have raced to assemble as a child. But this is the first cootie who helped assemble himself. You see, unlike the characters in most computer games, Mendel actually *learns*.



In Galapagos, Mendel *learns* to make his way around this colorful world.

Good thing, too, as he's the sole inhabitant of a world of trouble. In Anark's Galapagos (a new game due in the third quarter, as soon as Anark lines up a publisher), you're charged with helping this little tabula rasa escape from a dozen or so textured, polygon-based worlds laden with traps and pitfalls to snare the unwary.

Because Mendel is the very definition of unwary—when the game begins, he's effectively unformed—it will be your job to coax him into shape.

The game I saw last spring was still in pieces, but the basics were in place and working. And what I saw was impressive. Here's a case where the term "artificial intelligence" actually means something.

In the beginning, there was death. Mendel would take a few tentative baby steps with his four jointed legs—and walk off a narrow catwalk and die, step off a platform and die, get hit by a moving block and die, miscalculate the timing of an elevator and, well, die.

Early on, Mendel died a whole lot.

An hour or so of this—me feeling like a panicky father watching his kid's first bike ride—suggested that a watched Mendel never learns, and I decided to leave the little blue cootie to his own devices.

Those devices proved resilient. Some hours later, the little guy was not only very much alive, but actively helping himself stay alive—balking at the prospect of stepping into the void and observing elevator safety rules. Whatever had killed him seemed to have made him stronger.

That's a simple way of putting it. Mendel's based on a technology called NERM—non-stationary entropic reduction mapping—that, in essence, seeks to reduce errors.

Of course, sitting around and watching the little guy learn may be enlightening, but it's not very entertaining. So there's a game here, too. Your task is to smooth Mendel's path—clicking on giant blocks to keep them from smushing him and on moving platforms to keep them within hailing distance.

In the complete version (which will eventually be ported to Windows 95) you'll be able to give Mendel direct positive and negative feedback, either by option- or command-clicking on his body or by using volume-based feedback through the Mac's microphone. ("Bad Mendel! Off the sofa!")

And, after a fashion, he'll respond to you—not in words, but in synthetic, animal-like tones, the way an unwalked dog might sigh and groan. If you keep directing him into lava, Mendel may become reluctant to follow your lead. It looks as though he's not the only one who'll be learning.

Mac Shorts

Vitamin (Pacific Media WorX): B- A traditional vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up, to be sure, but it's a Mac-specific vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up, with some of the best-looking powerups you've ever seen. The only Vitamin deficiency is at the shop, where you can buy the usual extra life and weapons such as lasers and double-shot; the room uses what looks like placeholder art.

Descent (MacPlay): A A very spiffy high-res port of the vertigo-inducing PC classic: Doom meets flight sim. If you get addicted (which you will) and finish these 30 levels in short order, you can pick up the Levels of the World compilation, a disc with 100-plus more.

Star Trek: The Next Generation—A Final Unity (Spectrum HoloByte): B+ A decent port of a more-than-decent adventure. It brings over from the PC the elegant interface, a huge amount of character-specific commentary and the odd tendency to take control of the decision-making process now and then. New: A few graphic oddities.

Phantasmagoria (Sierra): B A generally respectable port of this seven-CD haunted-house classic. However, I question the wisdom of reducing the action to a central window rather than taking the game full-screen. The surrounding desktop hardly lends atmosphere.

Spycraft: The Great Game (Activision): C Liked the game: lots of CIA toys to play around with (if a few too many B-movie talking heads). Hated the crashes: The title consistently locked up both a Quadra 650 with a Power Mac card and a Power Mac 9500.

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PHILIPS

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AGES 9+

PlayStation

DOS CD-ROM

SEGA SATURN

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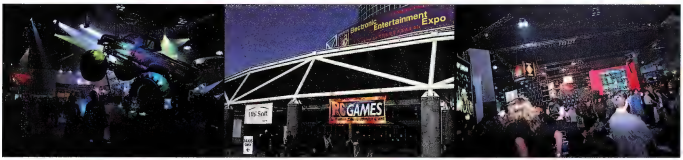
Frank wanted big technology to match his 2-time MVP-winning, power-hitting arms. He wanted 28 3-D rendered baseball stadiums to crank home runs. He wanted Motion Captured player sprites. He wanted authentic gameplay like pitchers losing arm strength. He wanted 6 modes of play, 9 pitch selections and 27 stat categories. And he wanted a ton of camera angles to check out the action. He got it... because whatever Frank wants Frank gets!

Acclaim
entertainment, inc.

THE 1996 E3 TOP 25

Edited By Christine Grech Wendin



The Electronic Entertainment Expo: We came. We saw. We played.

And we took notes. After all, when you're confronted with hundreds of hot new games, it's hard to remember the soon-to-be action classic from the adventure disaster right next to it.

In our June issue, we told you about more than 50 games we'd set our sights on in Los Angeles. As it turned out, that was just a taste of the cornucopia on display—and in some cases, behind closed doors. By the time the show was over, more than 450 companies had showed off some 1,700 new titles—including PC, console, and arcade games—and almost 58,000 people had crowded into the convention center to have a look at the future of gaming.

Of course, only a few of those games have the potential to be hits, so we've compiled the very best into the *PC Games* E3 Top 25. Put simply, these are the games we can't wait to play. To help you find your favorites, we've broken the games into various genres—Action, Adventure, Sports, and so on. And for those of you who want even more detail, we've compiled a list of 69 other new games.

We're not covering every game shown at E3, but if it's not in this story—or our June preview—you probably won't want to play it.

SEE *MORE* Online
http://www.pcgamesmag.com

OUR HOT PICKS FROM THE GAMES INDUSTRY'S BIGGEST SHOW, PLUS THE SCOOP ON DOZENS OF NEW TITLES COMING YOUR WAY SOON—AND LATER.

Bethesda's SkyNET is much more than a multiplayer Future Shock.

ACTION

1 SkyNET
Bethesda Softworks
Due September

Ever since the breakaway success of Doom, there's been no shortage of multiplayer action games. And, as this year's E3 demonstrated—in deafening stereo—there's plenty more on the way, most notably id Software's Quake.

But Bethesda Softworks, the company behind the popular series of Terminator games, thinks it's got a Quake-killer on its hands with SkyNET. The upcoming Terminator game started out as the multiplayer patch to Bethesda's Future Shock, then took on a life of its own.

When designer Todd Howard and the rest of the development crew began working with Future Shock's existing levels, they decided that that game just wouldn't cut it. After all—as deathmatch veterans can attest—when you're in a multiplayer game of Duke or Doom, it isn't a matter of navigating your way successfully through a maze as much as reacting to the environment and using the terrain to your advantage.

To accomplish that in SkyNET, the Bethesda crew took what Howard calls "the MechWarrior approach" and created eight massive new battlegrounds that mix open spaces and buildings. For example, you'll find a city with a highway running through it and plenty of buildings to hide in or scale. Up to eight players will be able to pilot HKs and jeeps in each of the environments, unlike Future Shock, which restricted the vehicles' use to specific missions. You'll be able to play customizable time-based, kill-based, and points-based matches.

With such a big playing field, though, it won't be easy to find your opponents. Enter SkyNET's Motion Tracker, which helps you zero in on their location. Of course, if you're using it, that means you've dropped your gun. Not a problem, unless one of your opponents hears you scanning and sets his sights on you first.

Thousands of showgoers went head-to-head in bloody Quake deathmatches at GT Interactive's booth.

While SkyNET emphasizes multiplayer games, it also gives solo players completely separate missions that continue the Terminator saga. This time, the Terminator and SkyNET are on the offensive as they attempt to take out a nuclear missile over eight new levels of play.

SkyNET also features slick new Super VGA graphics; if you install it, you'll benefit from the updated graphics in the original Future Shock, too.

Bethesda wants to make it a no-brainer for you to buy SkyNET, so the game will cost about half what'd you expect to pay. Our guess is less than $20. (Bethesda Softworks; 301-926-8300; www.bethsoft.com)

2 Quake
id Software
Due "When It's Ready"

Waiting for Quake has become life's work for some of us. At the close of E3, we were still waiting. Though it's likely the shareware version will be out by the time you read this, pundits and industry-watchers expecting to see it released at E3 were off the mark.

But even though Quake didn't ship, and id disclosed nothing more than vague mentions of a ship date in the next few months, this game was still one of the biggest stars of the show. After all, GT did offer the most complete look anyone's had of the game—the full shareware beta, seven levels, albeit with incomplete graphics and weapons. (Make that eight levels, though no one who played the game at E3 actually found the last secret level!) Happy showgoers crowded four-deep at overseas-distributor GT Interactive's huge booth to take the new game for a spin on eight computers with big-screen monitors. They had the chance to deathmatch or get up close and personal with the game's monsters.

The consensus? Quake's worth the wait. The game's lush 3-D graphics and realistic textures blew us away, as did the gruesome monsters, including the scrags, rottweilers, spawn, and shamblers. Blood, blood, and more blood is the name of the game. Another nice touch: Quake mostly does away with the standard text-based options screens, and lets you begin play via graphical means. For example, to start the game, you choose among three corridors: easy, medium, or hard. From there, you select one of four doors (for each episode). At E3, of course, only the single shareware-episode door was available. (id Software; 800-434-2637; www.idsoftware.com)

3 Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II
LucasArts Entertainment
Due February 1997

Master The Force in Jedi Knight.

Now that we've actually played this exciting sequel, we're even more excited than we were in our E3 preview. Based on the early version we saw, this Windows 95 game will be right up there with the top first-person shooters, including Quake and SkyNET. Silky-smooth scrolling, incredibly high detail, and seamless, mouse-controlled views up, down, and all around make Jedi a pleasure to navigate.

The game continues the story of Dark Forces' Kyle Katarn as he learns the ways of the Jedi while attempting to stop seven Dark Jedi from gaining the powers of a Jedi cemetery. The enemies, led by the

powerful Jerec, include the twin-saber-wielding Box and the evil twins Gorc and Pic.

As always, though, the real battle is between the Light and Dark sides of the Force. As you complete each of the 21 missions, you'll gain experience with The Force, which will enhance your normal abilities—jumping, vision, and others—and give you powers such as healing and teleporting weapons. The game's even got an option for a third-person perspective, making Lightsaber duels almost like a fighting game.

To top it off, Jedi Knight will also include three new multiplayer modes. And some of the best news we've heard: Lucas is redoing the save feature from Dark Forces to permit in-level saves, a much-needed enhancement. (LucasArts; 800-782-7927; www.lucasarts.com)

As Lara Croft, you'll become a Tomb Raider in search of the Scion.

4 Into the Shadows

GT Interactive/ Scavenger
Due by Christmas

Another potential Quake contender comes from newcomer Scavenger, who made quite a splash at E3. The company has more than 10 titles in development, but its action/role-playing game Into the Shadows made an especially big impression with incredible- looking 3-D graphics and fluid gameplay. For more details, see Game News, page 20. (GT Interactive; 800-610-4847; www.gtinteractive.com)

5 Duke Nukem Forever and Duke Nukem Add-ons

3D Realms/GT Interactive
Due 1997

There's even more first-person action on the way in Duke Nukem Forever, announced by GT Interactive at its E3 cocktail bash. The company has signed a deal with developer 3D Realms to work together on the next Duke, produce add-on levels for Duke Nukem 3D, and port Duke 3D to the PlayStation and Saturn later this year. Right now, this partnership, combined with GT's ongoing link with id Software and its distribution of Scavenger's Into the Shadows, gives GT a near-stranglehold on the hottest segment of the first-person action game market. (GT Interactive; 800-610-4847; www.gtinteractive.com)

6 Beavis & Butt-head in Little Thingies

Viacom New Media
Due October

Our final action pick is also a sequel of sorts (to Beavis & Butt-head in Virtual Stupidity), but this time on a smaller scale. The first in Viacom New Media's Cheap Clicks product line—low-priced games drawing on both the company's licenses and original ideas—Little Thingies continues the computer-game antics of TV's stupidest duo. This collection of arcadelike mini-games includes four from Virtual Stupidity and three new ones. In the new Thank You, Drive Through, players control Butt-head as he tries to feed a batch of familiar faces from the counter at BurgerWorld. Another game has Beavis trying to catch nachos and nudie mags while dodging furniture and a wrecking ball. Sounds, uh, pretty cool. (Viacom New Media; 800-469-2539; viacom newmedia.com)

ACTION/ADVENTURE

7 Tomb Raider

Eidos Interactive
Due Late 1996

The merger of Domark, U.S. Gold, and several smaller developers debuted its new name, Eidos Interactive, and several promising games. Leading the charge was the action/adventure title Tomb Raider, one of several new games starring a female heroine. (Rocket Science's Obsidian and Black Dragon's Riana Rouge are a couple of others.)

In Tomb Raider, you play the buxom Lara Croft, adventurer extraordinaire, in her quest to retrieve the legendary "Scion" artifact from the dark depths of a treacherous 3-D dungeon. The game is played from a shifting third-person perspective and features a stunning, textured 3-D environment with awesome light-sourcing effects. (Eidos Interactive; 415-616-2022; www.eidos.com)

8 Ecstatica 2

Psygnosis
Due Late 1996

More dark adventure awaits in Ecstatica 2.

This dark sequel to the cult hit Ecstatica continues with our hero facing another mighty task: Repelling the demonic horde that has possessed his castle and figuring out why it's there in the first place. Your wits will be tested as you attempt to reassemble a sacred seal and avoid a score of booby traps.

MORE ACTION/ ADVENTURE

Cyberia^3, Xatrix, Due Winter 1997

The company says it's already working on the next five (!) Cyberia games.

Dark Vengeance, Reality Bytes, Due Christmas

This 3-D combat/fantasy-adventure game sends you roaming an indoor/outdoor netherworld haunted by the undead. Up to 32 people can connect via Mplayer and other gaming sites.

Dragonheart: Fire & Steel, Acclaim, Due September

Although it follows the story of the movie, this action/adventure will let you fight eight dragons instead of one.

Outlaws, LucasArts, Due November

Take Dark Forces' action-game engine, throw in Full Throttle's animated adventure-game engine, transport the whole thing to a hand-drawn Old West, and you've got Outlaws, an improbable Mac/Win 95 action game.

All the while, you'll be fighting off an army of randomly generated monsters, including demons and gargoyles. The action will be more gratifying this time around because you'll have lots more room to fight in, more moves to choose from, and more weapons at your disposal.

The game will look quite different, too, using a technique called "ellipsoid technology" that creates figures from ellipsoids rather than standard polygons. The result is characters that are more detailed and lifelike. (Psygnosis; 800-438-7794; www.sony.com)

ADVENTURE

9 Down in the Dumps

Philips Media
Due September

Philips' new game puts you Down in the Dumps.

In this eccentric, graphically stunning adventure game, a family of thumb-sized extraterrestrials, The Blubs, is enjoying a pleasant holiday when disaster strikes: their spaceship collides with a vessel piloted by a drunken band of space thugs. Both ships crash on the alien planet of Earth, and it's up to you to help the Blubs repair their damaged craft and outwit the nasty crooks. Some of the places you'll visit include a surreal medieval Robin Hood frog town and a rock-'n'-roll party with some lice on a bum's head. The cartoon-style graphics, rendered in exquisite Super VGA, could help make Down in the Dumps a sleeper hit. Haiku Studios is developing the game for Philips. (Philips Media; 800-883-3767; www.philipsmedia/system.com)

10 Of Light And Darkness

Interplay
Due Early 1997

Windows 95 adventurers are in for a visual treat in Of Light and Darkness. When your sister is trapped inside a painting by contemporary artist Gil Bruvel, there's only one way

Westworld 2000: good robots gone bad.

MORE ACTION

Collision, Powerhouse Entertainment, Due August

This all-video action game has you driving—and crashing—for your life.

The Crow: City of Angels, Acclaim, Due November

Based on the upcoming *Crow* sequel, this 3-D, Win 95, multiplayer fighting game will feature bottles, sticks, bats, and other street weapons, but no guns.

Die By The Sword, Interplay, Due Late 1996

This DOS and Win 95 fighting game uses proprietary motion-control technology to make 25 3-D characters move and fight realistically.

Eradicator, Accolade, Due September

A multiplayer Doom clone with multiple perspectives, multiple characters, and a realistic physics model.

Gender Wars, GT Interactive/Sales Curve Interactive, Due Late Summer

As man or woman, you'll battle the other half in this three-quarter-perspective action title that resembles a more flexible Command & Conquer.

Gex, Microsoft, Due November

The slick Crystal Dynamics 3DO platform game comes to Windows 95.

Hellbender, Microsoft, Due October

Fury 3 grows up in this Win 95 sci-fi shooter narrated by the *X-Files*' Gillian Anderson. The hi-res game features eight regular planets (or missions) and a selection of special multiplayer planets that you'll be able to play via MSN.

The Hive II, TriMark Interactive, Due Early 1997

The sequel to the best-selling Windows 95 game.

H.O.S.T., MGM Interactive, Due Late 1996

Using a series of increasingly powerful droids, you'll battle your way through a top-down, 3-D, 360-degree world to free humans kidnapped by insane robots on an offworld mining colony.

Iron and Blood, Acclaim, Due Fall

A 3-D fighting game set in the Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Ravenloft world.

Mass Destruction, BMG Interactive, Due Early 1997

Like Return Fire, Mass Destruction's object is to destroy absolutely everything you see as you drive your armored assault tank through 24 target-rich battlefields.

MDK, Playmates, Due March 1997

Aliens traveling through space on energy streams have invaded Earth. As Kurt Hectic, you must stalk them using ambush tactics, a unique targeting system, and a broad array of weapons.

Scorched Planet, Virgin, Due Fall

Defender goes 3D—with a twist. You're a lone fighter pilot out to save Dator 5 from invading aliens. Fortunately, your craft can morph between a weapon-packed airborne fighter and a heavily armored assault tank.

Virtua Fighter PC, Sega Entertainment, Due September

Between Battle Arena Toshinden and the port of this smash arcade hit, it's looking like a good year for fighting games.

Westworld 2000, Byron Preiss/ Simon & Schuster, Due Fall

A first-person shooter based on the hit '70s movie. Westworld will be multiplayer over the Internet and have direct links to an associated Web site.

WWF "In Your House," Acclaim, Due October

New power-ups, secret pins, foreign objects, and themed venues tied to 10 wrestling superstars spice up this fighting game upgrade.

to save her: enter Bruvel's beautifully rendered world. There, you'll encounter Mephisto, keeper of the Euclidian Terror Chamber, and a host of strange characters and mind-bending puzzles in 60-odd locations. (Interplay; 800-468-3775; www.interplay.com)

FLY & DRIVE

11 MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries

Activision
Due Fall

Battle for money—not clan honor—in MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries.

Activision showed off many hot products, but a new addition to the MechWarrior family and a new driving action game garnered most of the limelight.

MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries is a new standalone DOS and Win 95 game that's set some 18 years before MechWarrior 2. This time, you won't be fighting for the honor of a particular Mech clan; as one of the Inner Sphere MechWarriors, you'll be fighting for your own personal gain. That's right: you'll represent whoever pays you the most, and you'll kill anyone who tries to get in your way.

This upcoming prequel will feature texture-mapped terrain graphics and approximately 40 new Mechs. While keeping an eye on resource management a la EarthSiege 2, you'll scavenge destroyed Mechs for vital parts. Lose an arm in battle, and you won't get a new one unless you have the bucks to buy it. (Activision; 800-477-3650; www.activision.com)

12 Interstate 76

Activision
Due Fall

The Mech 2 crew is also developing Interstate 76, another mercenary-oriented game based on the Mech 2 engine. Instead of piloting futuristic Mechs, you'll be behind the wheel of 25 fully textured 1970s muscle cars, outfitted with such luxury options as machine guns, flame throwers, and rocket launchers. Steer your way through a series of 25 combat-laden missions as you try to stop a gang of auto-driving mercenaries from destroying the largest oil reserve in the U.S. Rest assured, your car will skid, jump, brake, accelerate, and collide like the real thing, on terrain ranging from gravel and asphalt to mud and sand. While huntin' the bad boys, you'll be free to roam deserts, highways, small towns, and canyons.

Interstate 76 lets you groove and gun in your '70s muscle car.

Of course, the action will be accompanied by a funky '70s soundtrack, and you'll be wearing some groovy bell-bottoms. (Activision; 800-477-3650; www.activision.com)

13 Screamer 2

Virgin
Due Fall

Meanwhile, Virgin is prepping a sequel to its well-received arcade racer, Screamer. The game will include six new tracks, four new fantasy cars, increased difficulty settings, and day and night versions of each track. Some of the new racing locations include the English countryside, Egyptian pyramids, and Mayan jungles.

The second Screamer will be based on a brand-new 3-D engine that will allow for the use of more vibrant colors, smoother frame-rates, and weather effects such as snow or rain. Other new features include a working rearview mirror and hills with bumps and jumps. (Virgin; 800-874-4607; www.vie.com)

Government agents will try to stop you from reaching the Flying Saucer.

14 iM1A2 Abrams

Interactive Magic
Due October

More ground-based action to look forward to this fall: Interactive Magic's solid-looking tank simulator iM1A2 Abrams, modeled after the U.S. Army's M1A2 battle tank. The game is being designed by some of the same people that developed the highly acclaimed M1 Tank Platoon for MicroProse.

Players will command a platoon of four of the most technically sophisticated ground-based fighting machines in the world, from three different playing views: gunner, driver, or tank commander. Officer types will have the option of leading a company-size force with helicopters, artillery, and other vehicles attached. Missions and campaigns will be based in present-day trouble spots such as the Balkans, the Persian Gulf, and Ukraine, and you'll be going up against the latest in Russian military equipment, including T-90s and BMP-1s. iM1A2 Abrams will have three campaigns, and the result of one battle will influence what happens in the next. (Interactive Magic; 800-283-3542; www.imagic games.com)

15 F-22 Lightning II

Novalogic
Due September

If being airborne's more your thing, look for Novalogic's F-22 Lightning II. With realistic vector-thrust control and 40,000 square miles of terrific-looking ground terrain, this 21st-century fighter could be a contender in the crowded jet-sim skies. Easy-to-fly, fairly authentic, the game falls somewhere between Top Gun and U.S. Navy Fighters in the fun-vs.-realism spectrum. You get 30 main missions with clever scenarios such as "Protect Air Force One," plus special multiplayer missions that can be played cooperatively or as free-for-all dogfights. (Novalogic; 818-880-1997; www.novalogic.com)

16 Flying Saucer

Any River Entertainment
Due Winter

For even more fanciful flying, there's newcomer Any River Entertainment's Flying Saucer, perfect for *X-Files* fans with a passion for flight sims. Flying Saucer will let you break into Area 51, steal a flying saucer, and then fly it. Pursued by government agents and thrust in the middle of an alien war, you'll fly combat missions around the world, uncover secret alien bases, and abduct people, all while trying to rescue a missing friend. This combination action-adventure/flight sim will incorporate physics and flight dynamics projected from actual accounts of UFO encounters, making it a potentially "authentic" UFO flight sim. From the cut scenes and flight demo we saw, Flying Saucer could be pretty far out. (Any River Entertainment; 415-372-3550; www.anyriver.com)

17 X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter

LucasArts Entertainment
Due Late 1996

First there was X-Wing, and it was good. Then there was TIE Fighter, and it was even better. Soon, there will be X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter: A Star Wars Multiplayer Space Combat Simulation, and it will be the best—and the longest.

LucasArts' eagerly awaited space shooter adds 15 new missions and an 8-player network mode to the spectacular originals. You'll be able

MORE ADVENTURE

Eraser, Imagination Pilots Entertainment/Ocean of America, Due in 1997

An interactive sequel to this summer's big Arnold Schwarzenegger movie, Eraser will use Intel's MMX and Indeo Interactive technology to deliver video-on-video and seamless branching and navigation.

A Fork in the Tale, Any River Entertainment, Due Winter

Any River's first-person-perspective Win 95 game puts you on the mythical island of Eseveron, where you're on the run from angry huntresses, horse-riding marauders, and "really bad guys in cheap polyester suits."

Leisure Suit Larry: Yank Hers Away, Sierra On-Line, Due Fall

Larry tries to score on the HMS Bouncy cruise ship. The series' newest title will feature an invisible interface (left-click and hold to get a menu of verbs), scratch-and-sniff puzzles, and a way to make a cameo in the game.

Magic: The Gathering, Acclaim, Due Late 1996

Now here's a first—a title based on a wildly popular card game. Acclaim's Win 95 multiplayer strategy game promises something very different than Sid Meier's upcoming Magic project for MicroProse.

Mirror, Xatrix, Due Mid-1997

Mirror is an adventure game in which you have no idea who you are, where you are, or where you're going. The story will unfold via flashbacks.

Night of the Monsters, Acclaim, Available Now

Team up with Dracula, Frankenstein's monster, and other favorites in this comic adventure.

Obsidian, Rocket Science Games, Due Winter

This Win 95 and Mac 3-D adventure game features a female protagonist trying to solve a series of dreamlike mysteries in a surrealistic mix of organic technologies.

Second World, MGM Interactive, Due Late 1996/Early 1997

This online adventure takes place in a full-size, photorealistic Paris peopled with stylish, attractive citizens. Right now, it supports only chatting and shopping, but MGM swears a real game is in the works.

Discover new danger in Star Trek: Voyager.

Shadoan, ReadySoft, Available Now

Rick Dyer, the man behind Dragon's Lair and Space Ace, is back with a new fantasy adventure that'll incorporate Hollywood-style animation and a Disney-style theme song.

Space Bar, Rocket Science, Due Winter

A Win 95 and Mac comedy/detective adventure loosely based on the alien cantina in *Star Wars*. It's designed by Ron Cobb, who worked on the original scene in the movie.

S.P.Q.R., GT Interactive, Due Fall

In an expanded version of the game available on Time Warner's Pathfinder Web site, gamers will wander ancient Rome to discover the secrets of the city's founding and the mystery behind those who would destroy it.

Starship Titanic, Simon & Schuster/Digital Village, Due 1997

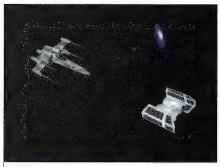
Created with author Douglas Adams (*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*), this updated *Titanic* will mix technology with Adam's trademark humor. The high-tech Starship vanishes, then reappears to flatten your house in the country. Your goal: figure out how to gain control of the ship and find your way back to Earth.

Star Trek Borg: Experience the Collective, Simon & Schuster, Due November 11

A full-screen, full-motion-video, interactive *Star Trek* episode starring Q (John de Lancie). Similar to the immersive Star Trek: Klingon, it's based on the Trek movie premiering the same month.

Star Trek: Voyager, Viacom New Media, Due Early 1997

The latest *Trek* series is the basis for this episodic adventure being developed by Looking Glass Technologies (Terra Nova). Voyager will feature authentically detailed, photorealistic 3-D environments, pitting gamers against a dangerous new adversary.



Serve the Rebels or the Empire in X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter.

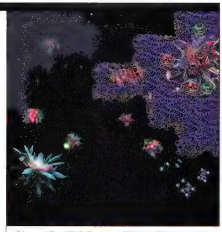
to fly for either side, taking control of a single highly detailed texture-mapped ship or an entire squadron, sending messages to your mates and opponents along the way. The missions will be designed specifically to foster cooperation among players to achieve maximum success, and you can navigate via new 3-D maps. X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter is being co-developed with Lawrence Holland's new Totally Games company. (LucasArts Entertainment; 800-782-7927; www.lucasarts.com)

STRATEGY

18 STARCRAFT

Blizzard
Due Christmas

Warcraft fans can look forward to Blizzard's next strategy game, Starcraft, this winter. You'll command one of three different alien races—each with its own unique strengths, weaknesses, and technologies—in an effort to restore order to a galaxy on the brink of interstellar war. While defending various planets, you'll embark on a series of strategic military missions. In the meantime, you'll need to closely monitor your use of finite resources. Expect the same rich storyline, stellar graphics, and fierce real-time action you enjoyed in Warcraft II. Starcraft will allow up to eight players to square off over a network and head-to-head play via serial link or modem. (Blizzard Entertainment; 800-953-7669; www.blizzard.com)



Starcraft will follow on Warcraft's success.

19 WAGES OF WAR

New World Computing
Due September

Wargamers with an eye to the future will want to check out New World Computing's upcoming Wages of War. Set in a dreary, decaying world, the game puts you in command of a rowdy pack of mercenaries. You'll kick plenty of butt on the battlefield, but you'll also have to turn a profit. Choose from more than 50 weapons and mercenaries, with turn-based, commando-style combat rendered in Super VGA for Windows 95 and Macintosh. (New World Computing; 800-325-8898; www.nwcomputing.com)

20 STEEL PANTHERS II

SSI
Due October

Strategic Simulations's WWII tactical tank combat game Steel Panthers has kept armies of wargamers up into the wee hours of the morning. Well, bleary-eyed tank commanders will get no rest with Steel Panthers II, slated for an October release. This DOS-based game will mirror the original's gameplay but will depict tank warfare from the 1950s to the present day.

You'll be able to command single-tank squads or an entire battalion in Europe, Korea, the Middle East, and other areas. Besides tanks, you'll have access to helicopters, jet fighters, and missiles. Digitized photos of tanks and modern video combat

MORE STRATEGY

Age of Empires, Microsoft, Due Spring '97

A real-time, Win 95 strategy cross between Civilization and Warcraft. Be the guiding spirit of a primitive tribe trying to become a great power over the course of 10,000 years.

Fly high in Stratosphere.

Battlecruiser 3000 A.D., Take 2 Interactive, Due September (maybe)

The game art for this long-awaited space combat sim is being redone, before a new round of play testing and debugging. Given that Battlecruiser's five years in the making—and more than two years late—it's no surprise the art needs a facelift.

Dive, Virgin/Criterion, Due October

An underwater strategy/adventure game in which you must help humankind survive the aquatic hell it has created.

Forbes Corporate Raider Game, Byron Preiss/Simon & Schuster, Due Fall

Build an empire in this real-time business simulation with first-person action. It's endorsed by the kooky candidate's company.

Galaxis, TriMark Interactive, Due Fall

TriMark's Win 95 multiplayer strategy game focuses on resource management, diplomacy, and military tactics as you build and maintain an interstellar empire. Up to 2,000 people will be able to play in a single game via e-mail, network, and the Internet.

Robert E. Lee: Civil War General, Sierra On-Line, Due Summer

Command the forces of the South in seven historical battles enacted in stunning Super VGA.

Stratosphere: Conquest of the Skies, Acclaim, Due Late 1996

In this real-time Win 95 strategy game, you don't just build civilizations to attack the enemy; you design, build, and fly giant floating fortresses, complete with retro-futuristic weapons.

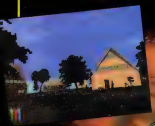
Tom Clancy's SSN, Simon & Schuster, Due November

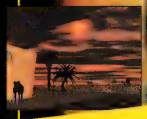
Best-selling author Tom Clancy mixes action, suspense, and technology in this new submarine sim. As the commander of the Navy's hottest new sub, you'll engage in 16 custom missions seemingly torn from the pages of one of Clancy's novels.

Viper: Operation Red Sector, New World Computing, Due October

This Win 95 game casts you in the role of Jake Manson, a fighter pilot who must save the Earth from hordes of evil forces over the course of 40 challenging missions.

On August 30th...





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...computer role playing will be changed forever!

Announcing *The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall*, Bethesda's latest installment in the Elder Scrolls Series and the sequel to the award-winning *TES:Arena*.

TES: Daggerfall is one of the most ambitious computer games ever devised. This is no dungeon hack, no bit of fluff with medieval trappings. Daggerfall's world is twice the size of Great Britain, filled with people, adventures, and scenery as real as reality. This is a world designed to allow you to play the game any way you want. Be the Hero or the Villain... or anything in between.

TES: Daggerfall is all your favorite movies and books wrapped up in one package—with hundreds and hundreds of hours of playtime. Prepare to experience your new obsession.

"The many excellencies of The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall mean that Bethesda is going to be the company defining the future of CRPG-ing on computers for some time to come. Wait for this one with bated breath."
—Strategy Plus

"This is the game that hardcore FRPG fans have been waiting for since the beginning ... Daggerfall will introduce players to a mirror land inside their computer that looks and feels like real-life ...."
—Trent Ward, PC Gamer

Actual IBM screens shown

Bad dog, don't cast that spell!

RATING PENDING RP RATING PENDING ESRB

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8.96 PC6A

footage will add an extra touch of realism. (Strategic Simulations; 800-601-7529; www.ssionline.com)

21 Heroes of Might and Magic II: The Succession Wars

New World Computing
Due October

New World is also looking to make a great game even better. In Heroes of Might and Magic II: The Succession Wars, Lord Ironfist is dead and his sons are locked in a struggle for power that has thrust the land of Enroth into civil war. Players must choose a side—good or evil—and summon an army to help win the battle for domination.

New World has upped network play from four players to six, and Heroes II will boast 40 new individual scenarios and an extensive campaign. Besides offering new monsters and spells, New World is also revamping the artificial intelligence to provide more-challenging solo play. (New World Computing; 800-325-8898; www.nwcomputing.com)

22 Lords of the Realm II

Sierra On-Line
Due Fall

Another big strategy sequel coming this fall is Sierra's Lords of the Realm II, developed by Impressions. You're a 12th-century English lord trying to acquire and manage enough resources to field an army and conquer other lords' territories. Kingdom and resource management is turn-based, while the battles are real-time. Lords of the Realm II will also feature network and modem play. (Sierra On-Line; 800-757-7707; www.sierra.com)

SPORTS

23 NFL Total Control Football

Philips/BlueSky Software
Due September

Philips kicks off its new line of sports titles with NFL Total Control Football, which could put football fanatics in pigskin heaven. The game strives to combine the fast-paced action of an arcade football game with in-depth strategizing. You can choose both on-the-field and front-office roles, or opt for just one and let the computer handle the rest.

Sports buffs will take to the field with real NFL teams in 3-D–rendered stadiums. But while the arcade portion features motion-captured, polygonal players based on real player stats, you won't find any familiar names. BlueSky is hoping to add real NFL players to the next version, along with multiplayer support.

Up next in the new line will be Total Control Basketball, due this winter. (Philips Media; 800-883-3767; www.philips/media/system.com)

MORE FLY & DRIVE

Aqua'Tak, Virgin/Criterion, Due Christmas

An arcade powerboat racer that's heavy on combat, heavy on attitude.

Armored Fist 2, Commanche 3, Novalogic, Due Fall

New Voxel Space 2 technology gives the classic tank sim and the aging copter sim a much-needed facelift. Look for smoother 3-D effects, more detailed terrain, a longer line of sight, and multiplayer action in both updated games.

The Condemned, Microsoft, Due Spring 1997

Microsoft does Mechs for Windows 95. Developed by Gray Matter.

Confirmed Kill, Eidos Interactive, Due Winter

Eidos' WWII online flight sim will offer 60 realistic aircraft and sharp Super VGA graphics. You'll be able to command your own squadron and plan team strategies, or dog fight mano-a-mano with other online pilots from around the world.

Daytona USA, Sega Rally Championship, Manx TT Superbike, Sega, Due Fall and Winter

More PC ports from Sega, complete with hi-res graphics, fast frame rates, and smooth gameplay.

Demon Driver, Philips Media/Haiku Studios, Due Fall

Win a series of perilous 3-D races on your 21st-century hoverbike to gain social status.

Flight Sim 6 for Windows 95, Microsoft, Due November

Thanks to the Voxel Space 2 engine, Armored Fist 2 looks better than the original tank sim.

This venerable classic gets updated with two new planes, drag-and-drop windows, and video-based aerobatic lessons from champion pilot Patty Wagstaff.

Flying Corps, Empire Interactive, Due October

The WWI flight-sim sequel to Dawn Patrol features contoured 3-D landscapes based on period recon photos, a new flight model, six planes, four campaigns, and modern-to-modem play.

Ganymede, Rocket Science, Due 1997

Battle aliens on vaporsleds racing over an icy Jovian moon in this Win 95 shooter.

Planetary Raiders, Interactive Creations, Due Fall

This hi-res online game will put players in a no-holds-barred fight for dominance in a solar system whose homeworld has been depleted of resources. Fly, fight, or manage against hundreds of players at once.

Solar Crusade, HMotion, Due November

Destination: Mars. Mission: Annihilate the dreaded Kesh Ran fleet as you take on alien entities and defy diabolical deathtraps. Players will challenge enemies around Mars' moons and comb the planet's canyons for baddies in 14 brutal levels.

MORE BRAIN DRAIN

Battleship, Risk, Scrabble, Hasbro Interactive, Due Fall

Classic 3-D follow-ups to the company's successful Monopoly CD. Like Monopoly, these new games will give you the option of Internet play.

Sci-Fi Channel Trivia Game, Byron Preiss/Simon & Schuster, Due Fall

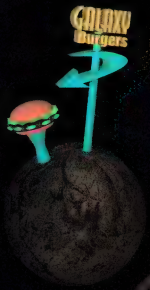
Trekkers and X-philes will feel right at home with these 5,000 questions in five categories. For one or two players.

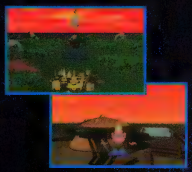
One intergalactic space surfer,

one totally thrash invasion fleet,

one killer babe . . .

. . . Cool!





SPACE DUDE

Published by

FORMGEN

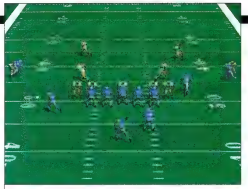
CATCH THE WAVE APRIL 1ST

24 Madden NFL '97

Electronic Arts
Due Fall

We also got a sneak peek at Electronic Arts' long-delayed Madden NFL '97 for the PC. It looks like it'll be worth the wait. NFL '97 will ship with more than 300 Madden-designed offensive and defensive plays, and more than 100 teams with all the real NFL players, including 68 all-time and Super Bowl teams, 30 current teams, and 6 secret teams.

Just as you'd expect, the game will be chock full of new Maddenisms, and you'll also get his team-by-team scouting reports. It's a long way from completion, but the PC adaptation looks even better than the PlayStation



Total Control Football: from field to front office.

MORE SPORTS

Lunar Golf, Berkeley Systems, Due Fall

Berkeley Systems' first sports offering, Lunar Golf, will let you swing your way across the fanciful terrain of the low-gravity moon.

Pandemonium Golf, IBM, Due October

Doom meets Links in this unique game of urban assault golf. Play 18 bizarre fantasy holes located in New York, Los Angeles, and New Orleans. Celebrity announcers and caddies add to the oddball appeal.

NBA Jam Xtreme, Acclaim, Due Late 1996

"Yes! And it counts!" Better graphics, bigger players motion-captured from NBA star Juwann Howard, and the voice of Marv Albert boost the intensity level of this 2-on-2 classic, now for Win 95.

Space Jam, Acclaim, Due November

In a style similar to NBA Jam, Space Jam lets you play 3-on-3 with Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and a digitized Michael Jordan. Based on the upcoming movie.

Striker 96, Acclaim, Due August

This new soccer game offers indoor and outdoor play, with impressive grass textures and big, detailed players.

TPC at Sawgrass, EA Sports, Due Summer

An add-on course for EA's PGA Tour '96 that brings golf's most famous hole—the 17th at Sawgrass—to your PC.

NFL Quarterback Club '97, Acclaim, Due Fall

Motion capture, 1,000 plays, and weather conditions that really affect play highlight the latest release in the gridiron series.

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A VILLAINOUS USURPER
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Rise To The Challenge...

NEW WORLD COMPUTING, INC.

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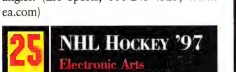
version, with motion-captured player animations and unlimited TV-style camera angles. (EA Sports; 800-245-4525; www.ea.com)



The next installment in Electronic Arts' widely popular NHL Hockey series looked equally impressive. NHL Hockey '97 will feature real-time rendered, 3-D polygonal players built with thousands of animations for enhanced realism.

Look for updated team rosters, player ratings, and logos when it ships this fall. You will also get computer-controlled players with improved artificial intelligence, something that's been a thorn in the series' side. And you'll also be able to set up and execute scoring plays, take advantage of powerplays, and work to kill penalties. Another key enhancement: new double-tap moves for making saves, checks, and scores. But watch out: the computer-controlled skaters will use the same moves. (EA Sports; 800-245-4525; www.ea.com) ■

3-D AT E3

E3 is a show about software. Even so, manufacturers of 3-D acceleration technology made quite a showing with their demos of souped-up games running in glorious 3-D. While everyone agreed that Microsoft's Direct3D will create a standard in the fledgling market, it's just the baseline. Hardware-makers must still convince game developers that their particular implementation of 3-D will be the one that they should optimize their games for. Here are some of the 3-D technologies you'll be hearing about in the coming months:

• One of the most impressive demos was 3Dfx's **Voodoo Graphics** accelerator. New titles like Tomb Raider and Hellbender will support it, as will boards from Orchid Technologies and computers from NEC. **(www.3dfx.com)**

• Matrox unveiled its upcoming **Mystique** board, based on the company's own MGA-1064SG processor. It will be available this summer and will be supported by such games as Aqua"Tak and Dive. **(www.matrox.com)**

• Diamond showed off its **Stealth 3D 2000XL**, which began shipping at the show (see review, page 90) and uses the **S3 ViRGE** chip. S3 had its own big booth at the show, where it touted such game developers as Acclaim (Alien Trilogy and Stratosphere), Eidos (Tomb Raider again), and Rocket Science (Ganymede, Rocket Jockey, Space Bar, and Obsidian), to a name a few. **(www.diamondmm.com; http://S3.com)**

• **PowerVR** was the name of the game for NEC and Videologic, who are jointly developing the new 3-D solution. No surprise, then, that Videologic will be the first boardmaker with a PowerVR product; look for it in July. The upcoming Compaq Presarios will use this technology, too. Future games that will support it include Namco's PC ports of Rave Racer and Tekken. **(www.videologic.com)**

• Creative Labs showcased Battle Arena Toshinden, Fatal Racing, and Actua Soccer, three new titles that support its **3D Blaster** board. **(www.creativelabs.com)**

• ATI didn't just show off its **3D Rage** chip and **3D Expression** boards, it let showgoers use them to compete for prizes. Playing on 3D Rage-equipped NEC PowerPlayer systems, booth visitors tested their skills on Mech-Warrior 2, Mortal Kombat 3, and Assault Rigs. **(www.aitech.ca)**

Advertisement

Sex and

Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh adds a bit of kink to its sexy scenes.

More, But Is

Silicon sex and virtual violence get more intense and more realistic in this year's crop of computer games. It's no surprise why.

Sex. And violence.

Slathered like Miracle Whip on pimiento loaf, they're spreading everywhere, to the point where they've become the meat itself—or what passes for meat—in TV, movies, ads, and computer games.

Maybe even above all in computer games. 1996 promises to be the most violently sexy—or sexily violent—year in the industry's history, as a stroll around the floor of last May's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) revealed. Revealed? You couldn't miss it—kiss-kiss bang-bang (not to mention chop-chop, knife-knife, and whatever else trips your tastes) dominated the din. Sex and violence on the interactive march. The great combination condiment of male 20th-century entertainment has become fully digital.

But does it still work?

Certainly it *gets* lots of work. Passion and pain are part of everybody's stock-in-trade. And

Violence '96: It Better?

By Keith Ferrell

despite the complaints of parental and political groups, they're finding ready homes on retailers' shelves. The attention paid over the past two years to Sierra On-Line's Phantasmagoria, Electronic Arts' Noctropolis, Gazelle Technologies' Midnight Stranger, and half a dozen others has ensured that this year would see another rise in the sex-and-violence sweepstakes.

Fortunately, it appears that this time around, some of the players are going for more than cheap thrills and gross-outs. If the parade of violent, sexy games at E3 was unrelenting en masse, many of the games themselves displayed original approaches to their subject matter, using sex and violence as storytelling and game-playing tools. In at least one case, there's the heart of a moralist lurking behind the displays of flesh and blood.

Riana Rules

April 1996 Playboy Playmate Gillian Bonner is the brains—and, let's face it, the body, too—behind Black Dragon Productions' Riana Rouge. Being prepared in two versions—one for mature players, the other for teens—Riana is a story about the importance of correct choices in a violent, sexual world.

"I wanted to create an evolving character," executive producer Bonner says. "She begins as a mortal with low self-esteem, a victim of

SEE MORE Online
http://www.pcgamesmag.com

abuse. But she has the potential to grow into a superhero."

Players will find achieving that growth challenging: wrong decisions result in Riana's death. But not just any death. When you screw up and cost the scantily clad Riana her life, be prepared for some of the goriest scenes ever put on a PC screen. Bones burst through flesh, gouts of blood erupt from wounds, and vomit gushes from Riana's mouth. She flops and twitches…and dies.

"This was an issue with me," says Bonner. "Death isn't trivial. If you don't portray violence as it is, you take away its impact. Violence is awful: don't pretend it's something it's not."

Bonner is a savvy marketer as well as a philosopher of violence; she knows the adrenaline rush gamers get from gory death. "It *sells*," she acknowledges, but she's determined to sell violence that makes her point. Players can have the adrenaline rush, "but they'll also get to know their own mortality."

Sex sells, too, but don't look for any centerfolds in Bonner's game, despite her *Playboy* bona fides. "There are nude scenes but no nudity," she says with a hint of tease in her voice. "Players will think they saw more than they really did." And making the right choice remains important. "Sex has consequences, just like violence. Players have to decide whether or not to have sex, and then deal with the game's response."

Playboy Playmate Gillian Bonner is the brains—and the body—behind Riana Rouge. The game offers sexy outfits and plenty of gore, but never mixes the two.

One thing Bonner is committed to is abstention from sexual violence. "I hope violence against women isn't becoming a trend in the industry," she says. "There's none of it in Riana." In fact, the game's plot begins with Riana escaping from a situation of aggressive—but not explicit—sexual harassment.

Hoping to reach all ages, Bonner will release two versions of Riana Rouge. The teen version will lack the gore and sex of its grownup sister, but will contain the same gameplay and situations. "I don't expose children to violence and sex. Teen-agers don't need to see all the material to enjoy the game," Bonner says, while assuring us that the mature version "will push the envelope as far as anything that's out there."

But the game's biggest issue may be gender, not sex or violence. Will male players respond to a character with a female point of view?

The "Yuck" Factor

Sometimes, it's what happens to characters that's the point. Sierra On-Line hopes to lure players of last year's Phantasmagoria, one of the first games to really up the ante in terms of sex and violence, to the even sexier and more violent Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh (see preview, July 1996, page 40). "This one has more in every way," says senior product manager Dale Christensen. "We've taken the 'yuck' factor through the top."

That means gore, gore, and more gore in the new horror game. There's also plenty of sex, particularly of the S&M variety. Christensen is upfront about the goals for the second Phantasmagoria. "This is the most graphic non-porn game yet," he says. The more graphic, perhaps, for the fact that it's an all-video production, storyboarded like a movie and shot like a movie.

There's every reason to believe that the increased explicitness will result in bigger sales. "In the first Phantasmagoria, the sex and violence helped create controversy, and controversy is good for business," Christensen believes. "But if you took all of the sex and violence out of it, it would be the same game."

That's not true in A Puzzle of Flesh. The story itself—a dark, psychic horror tale—is drenched in violent overtones. The lure, and the danger, of losing control propel players into the story. How they handle that dark attraction determines the flow of the plot, and may well tell players something about themselves. As with the best horror stories, A Puzzle of Flesh points out that the darkest terrors are those that dwell within all of us.

Of course, Christensen doesn't deny the marketing potential offered by our very human fascination with matters of dark sexuality. "It's a great way to sell things," he says.

Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh pushes the violent buttons as well as the erotic ones. It's sexier, gorier, and likely to be better than its hit predecessor.

Pushing the Envelope

Here are some nominees for mainstream games that go over the top with sex and violence. Some of these games aren't out yet, but from what we've seen, they're all certain to push the acceptance envelope.

Best Use of Sex in a Computer Game: Riana Rouge, 'cause Gillian Bonner looks so good in a leather bikini

Best Use of Violence in a Computer Game: Duke Nukem 3D, 'cause Duke likes to fight

Most Gratuitous Use of Sex and Violence in a Computer Game: Catfight, hands down

Sexiest Computer Game: Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh, where S&M meets CD-ROM

Most Violent Computer Game: Quake, for having monsters peel off skin and throw it at you

Most Violent Game Ad: The severed-arm ads for Expect No Mercy

Sexiest Ad for a Non-Sexy Game: The bikini-clad pitchwoman for Destruction Derby

Best Computer Game With Absolutely *No* Sex and Violence: Tetris

Over the Top

That kind of psychological complexity doesn't play a role in Apogee's Duke Nukem 3D. The hit shooting game returns us to a world of horny aliens hungering for Earth women—and a Schwarzeneggerian hero ready to waste the invaders in the most violent manner possible. He's got the brawn, he's got the bulk, he's got the bullets; who needs brains?

Well, maybe you do, if you want to get past the way the game treats its female characters. The creatures want to breed and they don't want to wait. If you can find a captive female wearing a full complement of clothes, treasure the moment: It's not likely to happen again. The shareware levels' go-go dancers, who flash skin for tips, were one thing, but the ability to blast them into pulp just for the hell of it was another. In later levels, bound, gagged, but otherwise semi-clad captives abound.

"For the longest time," says Scott Miller, president of Apogee Software, "this industry has made games for the low-end market, for kids. The R-rated segment has not really been explored, and yet there's a tremendous R-rated segment in our audience, just as there is for movies."

Perhaps as a sop to retailers, Apogee includes a parental lock with the game, but Miller makes no bones about the fact that kids have no business paying a visit to Mr. Nukem's neighborhood. "We didn't want to make a game that was targeted for kids," he says. "Our game is full of adult content: strippers, violence, and strong language. That goes with the territory if you're making an adult game.

"There are R-rated, adult-oriented movies, and we wanted to make a game for that same audience. We didn't worry about losing the kid market because the game is explicitly aimed at adults." (To his credit, Duke never uses the "F-word," and players who shoot females will quickly find the game paying them back for their misbehavior.)

Despite the sex and violence, Apogee was never concerned with ratings, Miller says. "Once a game is done we try to get an honest rating, but ratings do not affect our design or planning. The adult content is in our games from conception on—we don't add it gratuitously, and it's not thrown on top of a game to stir up controversy. It's part of what we do."

Duke's content did encounter some early resistance from a few retailers. But time, and the game's enormous popularity, has overcome that. Success sells even better than sex, and the combination of the two is appealing even to cautious retail chains.

And what about those who say that Duke is sexist? Miller's response is punctuated by laughter. "Duke was designed 100 percent by males," he says. "I guess doing male strippers just wouldn't have given them the same thrill."

The popular Duke Nukem 3D uses off-color epithets and half-clad Earth girls as the background to an over-the-top killfest.

Lighten Up

Just when you thought it was time to get serious about sex and solemn about violence, Merit's Harvester reminds us that, yes, sex and violence can be laughing matters. With something to offend everyone, this black comedy was designed from the get-go to push all of our buttons. "We take a poke at everybody," says director of product development Roddy McGinnis.

Those pokes are embedded in a plot that may remind you of *Blue Velvet* or the more deranged moments of the lamented *Twin Peaks*, albeit in a 1950s setting. As McGinnis points out, "Our attitudes toward violence were shaped by the '50s and television."

Harvester claims to have something to offend everyone. So far, it's batting 1.000. To survive this game, you've got to know how to take a joke.

Back then, however, few people could have foreseen a world as weird as Harvest, where you wake up knowing next to nothing except that the town is very strange and very bloody. Using weapons ranging from your dukes to a handy chainsaw, with all the concomitant visual effects, you have to patiently solve a mystery—or bash your way through to its solution.

Billed as a "thinking person's parody of sex, violence, and just about anything else you can think of," Harvester gives players the choice of thinking their way through problems or bulling their way through them with resultant gore. "In that way, and others, it's intended as a commentary on violence and our feelings about it," McGinnis says.

But let's face it: Harvester—like other violent games, from Quake to Mortal Kombat—wants it both ways. "Sex and violence sell," McGinnis admits. "The trick is to incorporate them in a real story. That's what [writer/creator] Gilbert Austin and the design team [at DigiFX] have done, and that's why we're less worried about offending people than we are pleased with what we've given them to think about. There's a lot to think about in this game."

And in this industry. Do sex and violence still work? Sure they do—just as they have for centuries, in every media known to man. But the PC market learns fast and grows faster. In fact, with these games and plenty of others like them, it looks like nothing's gonna do sex and violence better—an odd, relative term—than computer games. ■

What Do YOU Think of Sex and Violence?

In June, we asked our readers for their thoughts on sex and violence in games. For a sampling of your responses, turn to our Letters column on page 10.

A red Voraptoid Disembowler attacks a civilian mining ship in the asteroid belt between Human and Voraptoid space. This event sets off a war between the two races.

Voraptoid ships surround a Human transport shuttle. Maybe it's time to make nice?

Alien Alliance

by FREDRIC PAUL

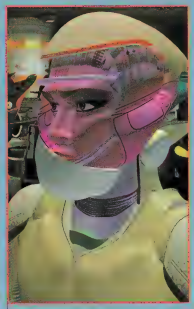
Space combat meets role playing

This test rendering shows what a fighter cockpit might look like if you stripped off the ship's shell.

Alien Alliance offers lots of different ship types. Here, a Voraptoid Disembowler gets a licking from Human Zealot and Weevil fighters.

Inside his scout ship, Henderson has no idea he's about to become the first casualty in a galactic war.

A closer look at the Kimbo Z-741 mining scout ship, piloted by Henderson, the unlucky prospector.



Crack pilot Maxine Rohner. Look for her in a different role later in the game.

in Windows 95

It's sort of a rule: Every space combat game has to have an angle. In X-Wing the angle is *Star Wars*. In Wing Commander III and IV, it's live-action video, big-name actors, and spiffy sets. Tiny Orbital Studios didn't have those options, so it came up with another approach for its upcoming Alien Alliance: mixing in role-playing elements and running the whole thing under Windows 95 (see next page).

Alien Alliance is basically a 3-D space shooter bolstered with significant role-playing elements. It's got fancy animated cinematics for takeoffs and landings, initial visits to new planets, and so on, but it also features two key gameplay enhancements designed to make it stand out from the competition.

The game's first big difference is what the company calls "Consequence of Rank." As you advance, gameplay begins to change, just as it does when you're promoted in real life. You start as a cadet, learning the interface. Then you get a pilot assignment as a wingman, going on to become a pilot with your own wingman. Eventually, you'll lead a squadron of eight ships, assigning pilots, ordnance, ship types, and so on.

Succeed in that role and you become a Commander, in charge of all four squadrons on the ship. At that point, you don't have to fly any more, though you can if you want. You're now part of the executive staff on the space carrier (think of those meetings in the ready room in *Star Wars*), where political concerns are increasingly important. Finally, you become Captain, where it's your task to assemble the executive staff and make the big decisions.

Orbital calls the game's second key difference "Consequence of Action." As in a game like Star Control, you share space with three alien races: the reptilian Voraptoids, the pirate Marauders, and the reclusive Scilliac. The big difference here is that you can have any type of relationship—allies, enemies, or neutral—with each race.

The game's conversation system is active even during combat, and what you say and do affects the development of the game. What do you do when you find the Voraptoids and Scilliac attacking one another—destroy them both, or let them be destroyed? Help one or the other if they seek your aid? If you oblige, you might even get the chance to go back to their homeworld and make friends—even learn to fly their ships!

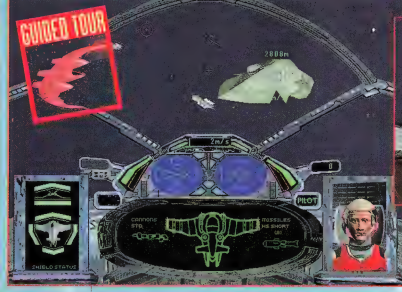
And that could become critical later in the game as you discern the existence of a fourth enemy entity. Like a game of Rock, Paper, Scissors, different ships have different strengths and weaknesses that make them most effective against specific opponents, and you might just need a particular alien ship to destroy your new enemies, the Lighters.

For example, one of the Lighters' craft is momentumless, which means it can turn and stop on a dime. Take one on in a regular ship and you'll be toast. Fortunately, one model of the Scilliac ships is also momentumless. Of course, that won't do you any good if you haven't made friends with them.

Similar situations crop up where you'll need the cooperation of the other two races. Each race has a particular problem, and only by discovering it and then resolving the situation will you have all the resources you need to defeat the Lighters.

With all these factors, you can still choose to play Alien Alliance with an emphasis on combat or strategy/diplomacy. If you choose the latter, you'll still have to fight, but making the right choices will greatly ease your path through the battles and improve your chances of learning the secrets of the game's 142-page script. The whole process is controlled by an RPG-like system of attributes that color your responses toward aggression, reaction, perception, or accuracy.

"We're taking a leap of faith that people really wanna do all these things," says Alien Alliance executive producer A. J. Redmer. "I hope all future products will have to be like this." (Virgin Interactive Entertainment; 800-874-4607)



The cockpit of a Zealot fighter shows target and status info, plus communications from your wingman. That's your carrier, the Lafayette, dead ahead.

Things look a little different from inside a Voraptoid Disembowler.

Commander Carron debriefs you on the Hangar deck of the Lafayette.

To succeed in Alien Alliance, you'll have to spend some time onboard alien ships. Here, you're inside the squadron quarters on the Voraptoid carrier Deathblow.

Alien Alliance Takes On Windows 95

Microsoft's new OS makes gaming easier, but not always for developers.

When executive producers A. J. Redmer and Karl Buiter and the four-man development team at Orbital Studios began work on Alien Alliance way back in March 1994, they never gave a thought to Win 95. They were building a DOS game, plain and simple.

But in the wild world of game development, nothing is ever that simple. So, on Thanksgiving Day, 1995, with Win 95 promising to reshape the gaming landscape, Virgin Interactive Entertainment, the publisher of Alien Alliance, dropped a bombshell: "Let's make the game Win 95–native!"

Hoping to dump its support headaches, Virgin planned to move heavily into Win 95–native games in 1996. According to Russell Kelban, vice president of marketing, the company is still planning for "almost all" of its titles to be Win 95. Virgin had released the puzzle game TriTryst as a Win 95–native product and was thrilled with the lack of configuration problems. "For them, that was the advantage," says Redmer.

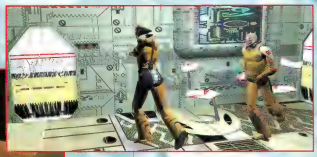
At the time, it seemed like a brilliant idea. After all, Win 95 was getting more hype than the Republican convention, and both Virgin and Orbital saw an opportunity to make Alien Alliance one of the first Win 95 games on the shelves. Everyone assumed it would be a piece of cake to make any needed changes to the game, but as it turned out, Alien Alliance became Virgin's Win 95 guinea pig.

On the plus side, says Redmer, "We enjoyed getting rid of DOS4GW." And moving on from that program and its "unfun" errors "turned out to be pretty easy." And, theoretically, Win 95 reduces developers' dependence on using other people's code, including drivers like UNIVBE. "We were totally happy jettisoning that," says Buiter.

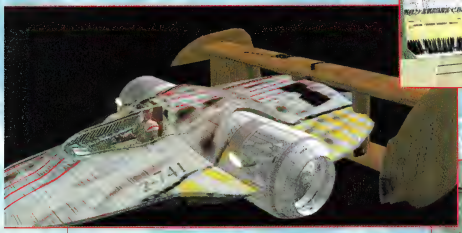
On the other hand, what

The Lafayette task force includes the carrier and various escort ships and cargo vessels.

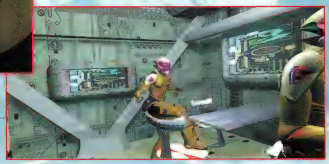
This Voraptoid fighter wing is getting ready to attack. You'll have to fight them first, make friends with them later.



Rohner and her wingman head for their fighter.



Henderson's scout ship may look slick, but it's no fighter.



Rohner and her wingman prepare for their next battle.

"should have been about a two-week process turned out to be a two-month process, and [parts of it are] still going on," says Buiter. Orbital spent two solid months struggling to get the game up and running again under the new operating system.

The big issue was trying to get three separate executables—the space engine that controls flight and combat, the SCAPE terrain-generation system, and the CAMP campaign-generation system—to run at the same time. Under DOS, they were designed merely to launch one another as needed.

Once that was finished, the programmers had to cope with a 16MB executable file, way too big for most gamers' systems.

All the while, Orbital was dealing with some very new tools. The company had just received the Win 95 DirectX technology, along with some demos and some "not very good" documentation. So even though the initial version of Alien Alliance won't support DirectPlay for multiplayer action or Direct3D for graphics acceleration hardware, working with DirectDraw and new sound drivers for Win 95 turned out to be a "bigger job than expected."

The final result? "Alien Alliance will run fine on a clean Win 95 system," says Redmer. "If there are any problems, they won't be related to our game." And because of Win 95, Orbital didn't have to invest time getting various joysticks and sound cards to work. "Hopefully," Redmer says, "it'll be a wash" in terms of development effort.

Was it worth it? "Yes," says Redmer. "We knew we were gonna have to do Win 95 sooner or later." And this way, Alien Alliance 2 will be a second-generation Win 95 game. "I really like that idea," Redmer says.

"It was the right move to make," agrees Buiter, "because Windows 95 will solve compatibility issues and extend the game's shelf life. It's also a way for Alien Alliance to stand out from all the other science-fiction games on the market."

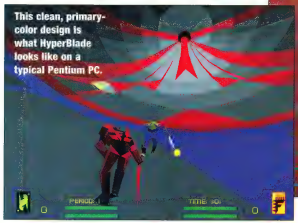
Of course, Win 95 hasn't done as well as expected, and Win 95–native games have done particularly poorly. But Virgin executive Kelban is still optimistic. "We're sort of in the early stages of the Win 95 rollout," he says. "Things might be different in the fourth quarter."

Ironically, though, while Alien Alliance has been delayed until later this year, Kelban says the delays are "not related to the transition to Windows 95." —*Fredric Paul*

Give me the Rok!

HyperBlade

By Fredric Paul



If you have a 3-D accelerator card, though, you'll see texture-mapped arenas that add a gritty urban flavor to the game's look.

Most sports sims struggle to re-create the nuances of baseball, soccer, and other familiar pastimes. Activision's HyperBlade, however, is a realistic simulation of a sport that doesn't even exist—yet.

Think of it as a form of two-on-two hockey, with elements of lacrosse, soccer, and the '70s sci-fi movie *Rollerball*, all played on in-line skates inside a giant half-pipe. Your playing field resembles a large barrel that's been cut in half and studded with various obstacles and powerups. The goals sit at opposite ends of the arena, each guarded by a goalie.

You have to skate, pass, and shoot the Rok while avoiding all kinds of deterrents and using the curving walls to pick up speed. Stay on the flat part and you'll be left behind. If you want to win, you've got to ride the rails high on the edge of the tube and use gravity to get yourself, and the Rok, where you want to go. Instead of a hockey stick, you carry a lancelike Jak, which you use to control the Rok.

HyperBlade may not be a real sport, but it looks authentic, thanks to the motion capture of A. J. Jackson, a champion in-line skater. Jackson is one of three top skaters who spent two and a half days demonstrating more than 75 different moves to be used in the game, including striding, passing, catching, blocking, hip checking, spinning, and various types of slap and wrist shots. There are no real rules, so feel free to bash, mash, and crash into your armored opponents whenever possible. After all, they'll do the same to you.

You play HyperBlade using reconfigurable keyboard controls, a joystick, or a gamepad. For this kind of fast-action, console-style sports game, a gamepad or keyboard is definitely recommended. HyperBlade will support two players on a single PC or via modem, and up to four players over a local-area network.

Designed to take full advantage of Windows 95's DirectX suite of technologies, gameplay was mostly fast and smooth on our pre-alpha copy. Things did slow down at crunch time, when several players shared the screen and we tried to shoot or fight. That should be fixed by the time the game ships.

While not yet implemented in our early version, the developer's ADLIB (Advanced Declarative Language for Interactive Behavior) engine will supposedly create players that better mimic the spontaneous actions of human players. Activision CEO Bobby Kotick predicts that players won't be able to tell the difference between computer-controlled and human-controlled opponents.

Even this early, the game looked terrific, as ADLIB combines bits of animation into a wide variety of realistic character movements. HyperBlade's mobile Smart Cam perspective follows the action flawlessly, but can make it hard to tell which way you're going. The excellent sound effects—including cheering and booing crowds and epithets from other players—add even more depth and realism.

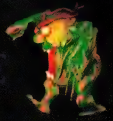
And the actual gameplay is only part of the simulation. HyperBlade goes all out to create the feeling of a "real" sport. The 12-team international league will engage in full seasons and playoffs, complete with benchwarmers, stars, and even endorsements for top players. Bigger stars will get better deals, while scrubs will be left with the embarrassing remnants.

Delayed several times, HyperBlade is now due late this summer. If it fulfills the promise of Windows 95 gaming by mixing its clever concept and slick good looks with smooth, hiccup-free gameplay, Activision will have a hit on its hands. If the game does well enough, maybe someday a bunch of rich guys will get together and form a real HyperBlade league. Naah—it just wouldn't be the same.

Neo-deco architecture and funky ads are designed to make HyperBlade into a complete simulation of a hypothetical sport.

HyperBlade
Activision
800-477-3650
www.activision.com

Developer: WizBang! Productions
Platform: Win 95 CD
Available: Late summer



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PREVIEW!

Dark Earth

By Steve Klett

So, as a computer game enthusiast you think *you* don't get enough sun? Well, compared to the inhabitants of Dark Earth, a stunning graphic adventure in the works from Mindscape's development team in Bordeaux, France, you're probably a regular sun worshiper.

The setting for Dark Earth is our own world, three centuries from now. A gigantic comet has narrowly missed the planet, triggering a meteorite storm of cataclysmic proportions. The Earth's familiar blue sky, once taken for granted, is gone—replaced with a dome of black dust. A permanent black smog limits visibility to a few hundred yards, and chokes every breath you take. Daylight has become twilight, and nighttime is complete, utter darkness.

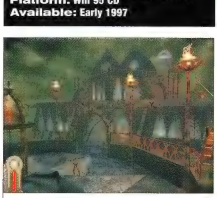
There are, however, a few places where the sun still shines—where stray shafts of light pierce the sky's black veil. In these places, the survivors of the cataclysm have built fortified cities known as Stallites, where they live in relative safety, trying to figure out how to control, conserve, and radiate the world's most precious commodity: light.

Dark Earth's inhabitants must learn to harvest and conserve what little light remains.

My, what a big ax you have.

Dark Earth
Mindscape
415-897-9900
www.mindscape.com

Developer: Mindscape Bordeaux
Platform: Win 95 CD
Available: Early 1997



Dark Earth is rendered entirely in 3-D and abounds with dynamic lighting and shadowing effects.

You are a servant of The Wise, a religious order of elders who protect the Stallites from the Disciples of Darkness. You are infected by these forces of evil and find yourself slowly being transformed into a creature of the Dark. Your quest is simple: find a way to save yourself. Of course, things aren't always as clear as they seem....

There's no doubt that Dark Earth's back story is powerful stuff. Even better, though, is the game's non-linear nature—it evolves according to the choices *you* make.

From a technical standpoint, Dark Earth appears to have the makings of the next standard-bearer in graphic adventures. Played via a third-person perspective a la Alone in the Dark, Dark Earth features extremely detailed 3-D modeled characters and truly impressive real-time light-sourcing effects. The game's 50-some 3-D locations are rendered on the fly, and you can view them from more than 400 different camera angles, which should hopefully mean no more hopelessly banging into walls as you explore (a common occurrence in third-person perspective adventure games). You'll also get more than 80 different characters, each composed of more than 3,000 animations.

Mindscape hopes all these ingredients will add up to the most realistic and immersive adventure-gaming experience yet. If the very early look the company gave at the Electronic Entertainment Expo was any indication, it's definitely on the right track. Dark Earth's characters, character movements, and environments are beautifully rendered, remarkably detailed, and above all, believable.

Oh, and if you think Dark Earth is all about adventure, guess again. You'll need to do a fair amount of fighting as well, using mostly medieval-style weaponry—you know, swords, spears, and such. However, more than a few vestiges of society's more modern death-dealing technology remain—if you can find them.

Mindscape is so confident about the quality of Dark Earth's characters and story that it's exploring book licenses and working with Paramount to produce a TV series set in the game's universe. Regardless of how these deals pan out, the game ought to create quite a splash when it ships early next year.

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An RPG with style

PLAY the Demo on the disc

PREVIEW!

Albion

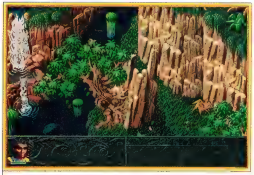
By Peter Olafson

You'll meet a lot of interesting creatures on Albion's surface.

Style can be a blessing or a burden. Any game that presents the same face to the world throughout its reign risks wearing out its welcome. You just get tired of looking at it, and eventually, you stop. Game over.

That unhappy fact seems to have registered on the psyche of the creators of Albion, a literate sci-fi role-playing game from Germany that's slated for release by Blue Byte in September. It's got a style that's, well…it's a little bit of everything.

You conduct a party of up to six members through worlds both familiar and strange. The familiar: The giant spacecraft in which you begin the game. You're the pilot who is to shepherd a government official to the surface of an apparently barren planet destined to receive a vast mining apparatus.



What's up? This is supposed to be a desert world.

Quit gawking and start exploring.

The strange: The actual surface, which turns out to be a lush, richly inhabited garden far from the desert world the sensors projected. (Scotty, you're fired.) Naturally, your ship crash-lands. When you recover and get your bearings, you'll find you're at the crux of an elaborate tale.

That 150,000-word story—drawn out in conversation with your companions and the creatures you meet—is one of Albion's outstanding features. It's not just tacked on as punctuation for combat, as is so often the case, and it's not just a mealy mouthed afterthought or (god save us) novella pack-in. Information is at your fingertips at every turn: for background, for casual detail, for peripheral quests, for the immediate task at hand. Text is always a presence, and while a few translation issues remained in the pre-beta I played, it was as much a pleasure to read Albion as it was to play it.

The gameplay is an interesting composite—one apparently inspired by project leader Erik Simon's earlier Dragonflight and Ambermoon (a German-language sword-&-sorcery RPG released in 1993 by Thalion).

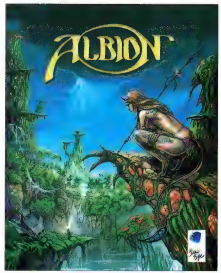
Much of it is handled using an angled-down view—a little like Ultima VII, but closer. You use the mouse to target nearby objects and people, and the resultant context-sensitive menu lets you know what, if anything, can be done to them. In addition, some segments adopt free-scrolling movement and a wide-screen, first-person view.

Combat is something else entirely. As in the Realms of Arkania games, it's turn-based, meticulous, and carried out on a square-based map. However, unlike the Realms games, fighting takes place on a two-dimensional superimposed grid.

The result is that Albion doesn't get tired fast; you're always seeing the world through different eyes. Whether the multiple views will ultimately damage the game world's consistency remains to be seen. But the signals are most promising. Albion is looking very good indeed.

Albion
Blue Byte
800-933-2983

Platform: Win 95 CD
Available: September



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EarthSiege goes strategic

MissionForce: Cyberstorm

By Shane Mooney

Once upon a time, many computer games resembled classic board games. They were turn-based affairs and involved moving various icons representing armies, tanks, and such across hex-based landscapes, carefully positioning your forces for victory. They were simple, fun, and addictive.

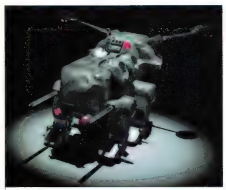
Then came the need to make "interactive movies" starring burned-out '80s has-beens, and the classic hex-based strategy game was nearly forgotten. Programmers who'd never seen a board game, much less played one, had their own ideas of what made a good computer game. Sometimes they were right. But by turning their backs on the success of board games, they often produced games that succeeded only in boring us.

Fortunately, we're now experiencing a renaissance of sorts, where game developers are once again making excellent turn-based games, using the same wonderful formulas that had gamers staring down their buddies across the cardboard till dawn. Just look at Sierra On-Line's exquisite MissionForce: Cyberstorm. A strategy version of the EarthSiege 2 action game, MissionForce's scrupulous attention to detail is exceeded only by its incredible gameplay.

It's the 27th century and mankind has managed to survive two EarthSieges from the man-made-machine-turned-enemy Cybrids. Humanity has grown and prospered under the guidance of expansionist corporate governments. Setting their sights on the riches of far-off planets, entrepreneurs can now find fame and fortune mining ore in distant star systems. But faster than you can say Utopia, our old friends the Cybrids rear their ugly mechanical heads to screw up your best-laid plans.

Now, you're an entrepreneur turned mercenary, commanding a fleet of massive, mechanized war machines called Hercs. Bioderms—replicated humans that serve you on the battlefield—pilot the Hercs against the Cybrids attacking your bases and vying for your precious ore. The Cybrids seem to be up to some mysterious, grand scheme. Ultimately, you must discover the nature of their plans and put a stop to them before we have another EarthSiege on our hands.

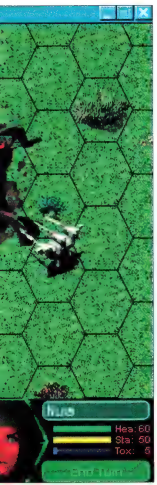
Not an action sim, MissionForce: Cyberstorm is a hex-based strategy game.



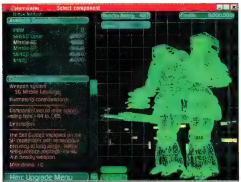
The Cerebrus Cybrid may look weak, but it can take out your shields quickly.

You begin the game as a new recruit in charge of a couple of rattle-trap Hercs piloted by cheap Bioderms with extremely poor military skills. To build up your forces you must amass more credits or rise in rank. Odds are, with just a couple of throwaway clones and poorly armed mechs, you won't be named general anytime soon. So you're going to have to go on a lot of mining missions, fighting off the occasional Cybrid Herc, until you amass enough credits to buy the killer hardware and Bioderms you need to truly kick butt.

Once you start earning promotions, you'll slowly gain access to up to eight different Hercs, each with a fully customizable chassis. You can choose from several pre-configured Hercs or buy the basic chassis and add your favorite armor, shields, and weapons (there are 70 of them) to best take advantage of your Bioderms' skills.



You'll need to select your Bioderms carefully to get the best pilots for your money.



Better come up with a strategy for properly equipping your Hercs for battle.

Naturally, selecting the right Bioderms is critical to your success. These clones of the best Herc pilots in history vary widely in skill level. Some are considerably better than others, and you get what you pay for. Thankfully, they can gain valuable experience points in battle, and you can beef up their weapons skills by using Virtual Reality Training.

Your missions take place on beautifully rendered, 3-D hex-based planetscapes, ranging from harsh, pock-marked moons to lush wilderness filled with rivers and high mountains. From a top-down perspective, you carefully move your Super VGA Hercs to hunt for ore, destroy Cybrid threats, or perform reconnaissance. Commanding up to 28 different units at once, you can use the landscape to your advantage, hiding behind boulders or in craters to gain a tactical advantage and avoid losing your forces to the enemy. If you find yourself in a sticky situation, you can even readjust your shields to give you more strength where you need it most.

You can also use stimulants known as StimGlands to temporarily boost your Bioderms' performance. Just be careful: the more StimGland you use, the more unstable a Bioderm becomes, and you risk poisoning it to death.

Depending on how much time you've got, you can choose between a quick fight or an entire campaign; in the latter, you rise in rank, fight your way through a trio of star systems, and defeat the Cybrid threat once and for all. Completing a campaign will easily take you more than 40 hours of absorbing gameplay.

The best part of MissionForce is that each mission is randomly generated, so you never fight the same battles twice, even if they take place on the same planet. Planets are generally consistent in their overall climate, but each time you play, the landscape is different, you face a new crew of Cybrids, and the ore will be located somewhere else. So you'll be facing a new and different challenge no matter how many campaigns you complete, raising the hours of potential gameplay into the hundreds, if not more.

Not only is the gameplay engaging, but there are enough bells and whistles to make MissionForce: Cyberstorm an instant classic. The graphics are superb: this is one of the only hex-based games to use true Super VGA graphics. The sound effects are excellent, as is the music, which is reminiscent of both EarthSiege 2 and MechWarrior 2. And, in a rare move, Sierra is shipping the game on two CDs—each with a full copy of the game. That way, you and a buddy can play via modem without having to buy a second copy of the game: a nice touch that's mere icing on a delicious cake.

So what didn't I like? Well, the only real problem is that the only instructions on how to play the game are in the online help on the disc. I know the company is called Sierra On-Line, but to have only an online manual for a game of this complexity is ridiculous. How expensive could it be to include a paper manual, or even a command sheet?

Also, though the game has three levels of difficulty, things can get real hard, real quick, and it can be frustrating trying to advance in rank when your Bioderms keep getting their protoplasm butts kicked.

But these obviously minor peeves shouldn't stop you from shelling out the money. If you're a strategy player, MissionForce: Cyberstorm is a must-own.

S.I.P. For tips on how to win at MissionForce: Cyberstorm, turn to our Strategy & Tactics section, page 82.

MissionForce: Cyberstorm
Sierra On-Line
800-757-7707
www.sierra.com

Platform: Win 95
Requires: 486/50, 8MB RAM, Win 95, Super VGA, mouse
List Price: $49.95–$59.95

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	A-

Turn-based strategy games don't get much better than this.

Getting medieval

Witchaven II: Blood Vengeance

By Shane Mooney

Even if you don't turn the enemy to ice, the Enchanted Two-Handed Sword does a good job of slicing and dicing.

The Enchanted Two-Handed Sword has a 25 percent chance of turning creatures into ice, or 50 percent if you wear your helmet.

It's proving to be a great year for sequels. Wing Commander IV, EarthSiege 2, and Caesar II all surpass their predecessors. And now you can add Witchaven II to the list of games that have proven to be better than those that spawned them. Then again, that really isn't saying much, given that the original Witchaven was strictly mediocre.

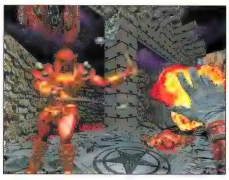
Having fought back the evil witches in the first Witchaven, you awaken the next morning with a massive hangover from the celebration to find that everyone you've come to know and love is gone. You quickly learn that a witch named Ciraé-Argoth didn't take kindly to you destroying her sisters, and she's Hell-bent on turning you—and your loved ones—into dragon chow. In keeping with the true spirit of a villain, she's given you a chance to sober up from your drunken stupor and try to find her before she finds you. If you expect to save your beloved village-folk before they're gone forever, you'll have to battle your way through 15 levels of Imps, Ogres, and assorted armored henchman.

At first glance it may appear to Witchaven veterans that the sequel delivers merely more of the same. But if you look a bit more closely, you'll see that there are some impressive improvements. Using a much-enhanced "Build" engine (the same one found in Duke 3D and TekWar), Witchaven II now has better lighting effects, sloped floors, and arched doorways. All the weapons and characters have been redone to take advantage of better rendering technology, and they look less pixelated than they did before. Instead of just a normal bow and arrow, you can now have flaming arrows and other enchanted weapons. You also get more spells, more potions—more power. The mayhem-wreaking possibilities are enough to make any would-be warrior weak in the knees.

Play a little Duke before your Witchaven, though, and you can't help but see where Witchaven II falls a bit short. The game's graphics are real choppy—nowhere near as smooth as Duke's—and it looks like the makers cut a few corners while rendering the bad guys. Their movements aren't very fluid, and at times their actions aren't very consistent with the landscape. On more than a few occasions, ground-hugging enemies are seemingly able to walk on walls before falling back to the floor. It just looks like the designers didn't take the necessary time to fully develop Witchaven II's world. Still, as a Dark Ages Duke, it's not bad.

One of Witchaven II's best features is that it allows you to create your own levels. Using both a 2-D editor (similar to a CAD program) and a 3-D editor, you can set up walls and place monsters, items and weapons. You can also create pits, stairs, or even elevators. With some patience and a lot of perseverance, you can create a killer deathmatch level that rivals anything in the game.

Witchaven II: Blood Vengeance may not be as wonderful as Duke Nukem 3D, but it's definitely a giant leap from the "Doom toos," and much better than the original Witchaven.



When sword-wielding negotiations fail, feel free to smoke the enemy with a carefully placed Nuke spell.

CHEATS

• After hitting Backspace, type the following codes:
MARKETING: God Mode (it's the only way the people in marketing can get through the game)
HEALTH: Increases your health
ENCHANT: Enchants all of your weapons
WEAPONS: Gives you all weapons

TIPS

Don't think you're a wimp if you can't hack and slash your way to victory. Sometimes the best way to overcome insurmountable odds is to use a Freeze or Nuke spell. • Tired of hand-to-hand combat? Don't forget that the extra Pike Axes you find can be used as projectiles—over and over again. • Enchant your weapons every chance you get; you'll inflict much more damage on your enemy.

Witchaven II: Blood Vengeance
Capstone
800-468-7126

Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486/66 (Pentium for Super VGA), 8MB RAM, double-speed CD-ROM drive
List Price: $29.95

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	C+
OVERALL	B-

While not as cutting-edge as Duke Nukem 3D, Witchaven II is a solid first-person action game.

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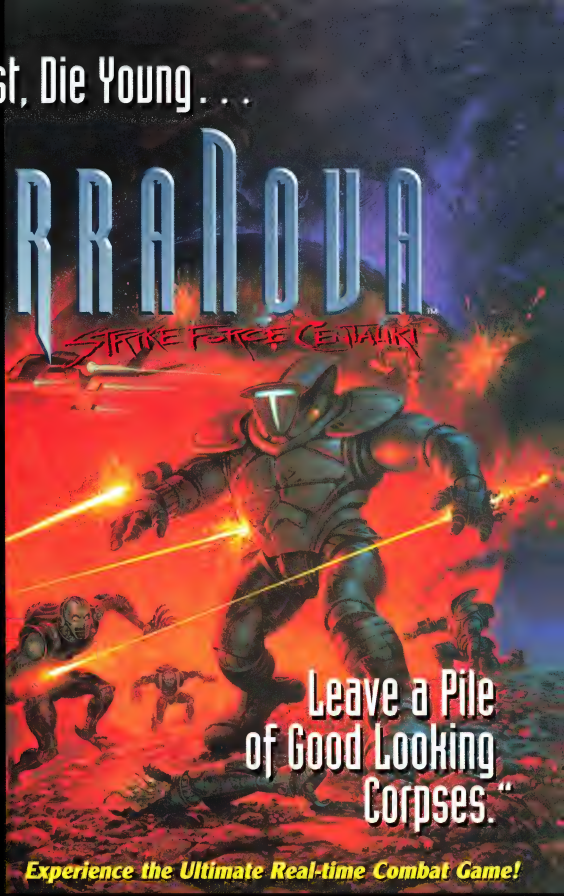

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Total Mayhem

By Shane Mooney

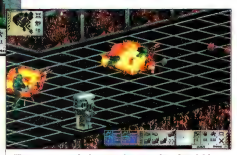
If there's one constant in the gaming universe, it's that all good games spawn clones. Eidos Interactive's Total Mayhem is one of the first Crusader: No Remorse imitators to hit the shelves. Sounds promising, but the game's several wonderful enhancements are marred by numerous flaws. Call it Totally Disappointing.

Total Mayhem does boast several improvements over Crusader: No Remorse—including the ability to control multiple characters at once.

Total Mayhem is set in that ubiquitous future scenario in which man-made machines have turned on their creators and need to be brought under control. You are entrusted with up to six cyborg freedom fighters to guide and command through several enemy strongholds. Your goal: Capture secret technology and cripple the 'bots.

The game's 20 missions put you in jungle, desert, and arctic environments.

Playing from the same slanted overhead perspective as Crusader, you use your mouse to move your forces in real time. You start out with two cyborg recruits on a simple mission, but before long, things get harder. With each successful assignment, your cyborgs get promoted and you gain access to better shields and weapons.



These pyrotechnics are impressive, but it'd be even nicer if the explosions made noise.

After being teleported into enemy territory, you can guide your forces one at a time or all at once as you search out your mission objectives. If you like, you can also surrender a certain amount of control by setting your cyborgs to attack at the first sign of an enemy—or you can do all the fighting yourself.

At first, the game's 20 missions may seem a little too easy. They're not. As you advance, you'll begin to discover hidden passageways, whole underground complexes, and missions with multiple objectives. But the best part, the thing that separates Total Mayhem from other games, is the multiplayer support. It's a cinch to set up, and you can tell a lot of thought went into developing head-to-head combat. A "Startup Wizard" leads you through setting up multiplayer network matches as well as head-to-head modem games. Plus, the game includes multiplayer-only scenarios such as an engaging variation of capture-the-flag.

Yet, just when you're starting to think this might be a great game, those pesky flaws surface in solo play. The character movement is a bit too much like gliding—unlike Crusader, the cyborgs don't walk realistically. And directing six characters at once can be a real hassle, especially if half of them don't do what they're told. A good 50 percent of the time, when I tried to move my group, one member would invariably break off and begin wandering to parts unknown or get stuck behind some obstacle. One time, I had a cyborg who refused to go back through the door he just came through, insisting instead on spinning in circles, no matter what I'd do. Now I know why it's called Total Mayhem.

And that's not all. Beneath a terrific soundtrack lies some truly terrible sound effects. For instance, you have these spectacular pyrotechnic displays of rupturing radioactive drums, but there's no accompanying sound effect. Say *what*?

It's too bad Total Mayhem was pushed out the door before it was fine-tuned. The basic game is solid and interesting. It's just not worth fighting through layer after layer of flaws to uncover the satisfying core.

CHEATS

For Total Mayhem cheats, turn to our Strategy & Tactics section, page 80.

TIPS

• Before heading out, be sure to have each cyborg stock up on batteries. You never know how long a mission will take. • No matter where you are, be sure to run the cursor along all the walls to search for hidden buttons. • During a multiplayer game, the mines you lay are invisible to your opponents, making for some nasty surprises. To evade enemy mines, you'll need to find a pair of mine-detector goggles. Better yet, kill the robots who laid them and they'll disappear. • Don't inadvertently destroy the fail-safe keys or leave them behind on a mission. They are vital to the completion of the game.

Total Mayhem
Eidos Interactive
415-513-8929
www.domark.com

Platform: Win CD
Requires: 486/66, 8MB RAM, Super VGA, double-speed CD-ROM drive, mouse or joystick
List Price: $49.95

GAMEPLAY:	C-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	C+
OVERALL	C-

A great game goes awry, thanks to technical glitches and unresponsive controls.

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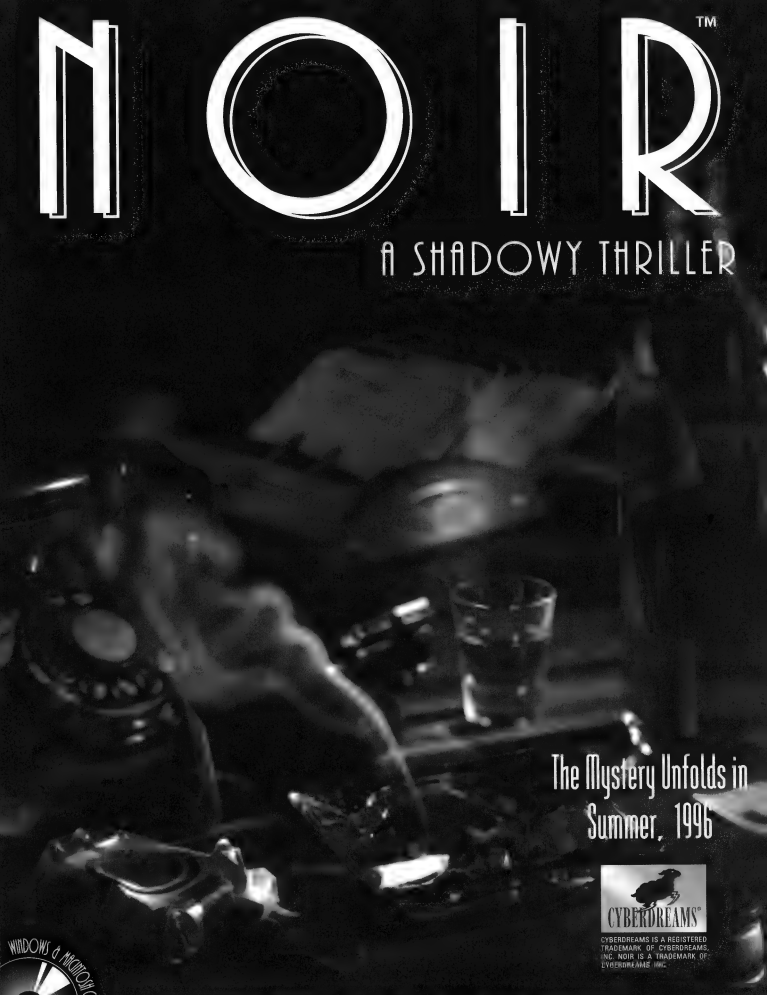

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A different kind of Doom

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Strife

By Peter Olafson

Remember, you don't want to shoot everyone.

Strife brings new life to a tired game engine.

Another sinister one-word title, another Doom clone. Not quite. Strife may use the Doom II engine, but within its action-packed torso beats the heart of a taut little adventure and role-playing game. It's the first attempt to do something strikingly different with this seminal game engine—most previous changes have been incremental at best—and, in most places, it succeeds.

True enough, you're still doing that Doom thing: running around stony hallways, collecting ever-nastier weapons and using them to cook the lion's share of the game's inhabitants. This time out you're an agent of the Front, a rebel group fighting the evil Order.

But The Order's a real group—they've got a secret headquarters, troops and everything—and you're the principal instrument for advancing a real story. And while, true enough, you'll often wind up shooting, you'd do well to open your ears before you pull the trigger, for the home-town folks have something to say. Their speeches lead to plot branches, items, information, and atmosphere.

CHEATS

• To become invincible, type OMNIPOTENT during gameplay. Just be careful not to wind up in a place where there's no way out, like the many pits.

TIPS

• If you're taking a beating, don't be afraid to retreat to HQ and stock up again.
• Don't go firing off guns in the town center, or you'll bring the full weight of The Order down on your head.
• Looking for the power station? Check out the waterfalls outside the warehouse.

The important ones speak to you in their own voices. Macil, who runs The Front, sounds a bit like Charlton Heston, and your guide in this 30-level labyrinth, an invisible operative who talks to you by radio, has the perfect smart, sassy tone, like something out of a good spy movie.

Strife is also the first Doom variant to use an open architecture. The town in which the game opens and its attachments—the prison, the power station, the sewers—don't simply follow one upon the other. Each of these "levels" is part of a single, flexible environment. You can move back and forth between them at will, checking out areas you may have missed, buying equipment and replenishing your health at the stores (which close down when gunfire erupts), or revisiting the HQ to boost your character's weapons accuracy and stamina. Oh, and you can torch The Order's acolytes. They burn very nicely, thank you.

Another thing I liked was the saved-game mechanism, which registers your progress only after you've reached certain key points. (Shame there's only one save slot per character, though.) This owes more to games like Marathon than Doom—where you can save anywhere, any time—and represents a sensible evolution that should inspire others working in this genre.

On the other hand, I'm not a big fan of the artwork. Visually, Strife sometimes comes off muddy, pixelated or slightly cheesy compared to Doom, and that's unlikely to endear it to an audience weaned on the beauties of Hexen and Duke Nukem 3D. The town levels, with their real-world anchor, are bound to a certain conventionality, and they don't have much of a Doomy dazzle.

A few technical cautions: On a machine running the QEMM 7.5 memory manager, Strife crashed repeatedly. (The good news is that these problems disappear under QEMM 8.0.) The Readme file reported a problem with network play that Velocity says has since been fixed; a patch should be available. Also, the sound-card setup routine doesn't recognize IRQs higher than 9, and I'm not overly fond of games that tell me to change my hardware settings to accommodate them.

But I like this one. Despite some rough edges, Strife is a definite advance from the conventional 3-D shoot-'em-ups of the Doom school. And these days, anything that isn't a bare-bones Doom is a definite plus.

Strife
Velocity
800-856-2489
www.velocity.com

Developer: Rogue
Platform: 486/66, 8MB RAM, MS-DOS 5.0
List Price: $49.95

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	C
SOUND CHECK:	C+
OVERALL	B

Adventure elements make Strife a refreshing break from the scores of straight Doom clones.

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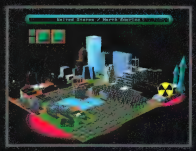

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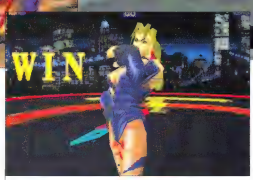
Violence is golden

Battle Arena Toshinden

By Daniel Morris

Find each fighter's combinations to unleash distance attacks.



What good's a victory if you don't rub it in?

Mondo walks softly, but carries a big spear.

When Battle Arena Toshinden made its debut on the Sony PlayStation, it quickly made a name for itself among the crowd of console fighting games. Now, ported to the PC, it shows us all over again what a good brawl is all about.

Toshinden is a visual treat, and the fact that the rich 3-D graphics aren't quite as nice as the console version's only speaks volumes about the original. This is a very worthy younger sibling. The action is breathtaking at times, and it's all captured by Toshinden's signature spinning camera.

Rotating and dancing in a 360-degree arc around the battle arena, the view of the match is unparalleled among fighting games. Compared to the piles of titles sporting a single, unchanging profile perspective of the fight, Toshinden actually gets you into the brawl. And it's never distracting, as many perspective-changing games tend to be: Each shift and repositioning of the camera is not only logical, but expected. You get the feeling there's a frustrated action director at the helm who's cast you in a Bruce Lee–style bone-cruncher.

It's a big stretch for a PC port of a console fighting game to match its predecessor for speed and handling, but Toshinden comes close. While not as responsive as their PlayStation counterparts, the fighters react with sufficient gusto to convince you that you're participating in world-class combat.

The set-up is as curt as any other fighting game. The world's eight deadliest warriors have assembled for an all-out donnybrook. One will prevail and the rest will…well, they won't prevail. But there's honor at stake, and bragging rights to be won, so the fisticuffs begin and no further questions need be asked.

In single-player mode, you'll compete in the standard tournament, which consists of dueling the seven other fighters in succession and then, victory permitting, going to bat against the game's Boss, the fearsome Gaia.

But no one buys these games to play the computer tourney. That's just for practice. Toshinden brings you network, modem, and serial play, and supports single-machine multiplayer action if you have a Gravis GrIP. A word of caution is necessary here, though: the set-up screens are practically worthless, and only through a ridiculously long process of guess-and-by-golly did I manage to set the game up for single-system multiplayer with the GrIP.

Once there, all hassles are forgotten. Each warrior brings a highly individualized fighting style to the arena. Rungo, the steroidal club-swinger, deals out a lot of damage but is ponderously slow. His diametric opposite is the wily, acrobatic Ellis, who can practically fly and fights with a set of steak knives. Experience will allow you to tailor a successful strategy for each. For my money, though, Mondo the spear-carrier is Top Dog around these parts.

I might also recommend that you take a look at the game in its high-res, smaller-screen mode. If you're the kind of person who doesn't mind watching a letterboxed movie, you'll enjoy the sharper details in the high-res setting.

Violence may not be a solution to the world's problems, but a brilliant beat-'em-up like Battle Arena Toshinden is just too skull-bashingly satisfying to let sit around. Blame society.

TIPS

- Solve the one-player tournament and you'll be treated to a demonstration of the secret desperation moves of the fighter you solved it with.
- Defense is a factor, boys. Learn to block, duck, and roll, or you'll quickly find yourself in the hurting chair.
- Don't rely on your weapon. Weapon strikes are easily parried, but a nice surprise kick can work wonders.
- Gaia inflicts incredible damage, so concentrate on not getting hit. It takes only a few well-timed blows to beat him, and the trick is to dodge his fire long enough to land them.

Battle Arena Toshinden
Playmates Interactive Entertainment
314-407-1400
www.playmatestoys.com

Developer: Digital Dialect
Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486DX/66, 8MB RAM, DOS 5.0, sound card
List Price: $50–$60

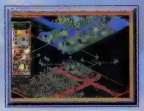
GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	C-
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B-

B+ OVERALL

An attractive and engaging fighting game distinguished by great 3-D graphics and a 360-degree rotating camera.

AND ON THE 8TH DAY, HE SPLIT TO MAUI, AND LEFT YOU IN CHARGE.

Don't forget to feed the fish.



Build and manage two planes, Heaven and Hell, simultaneously.

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Disasters include Disco Inferno (pictured), Hell in a Handbasket and Heaven Mosh.

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http://www.lucasarts.com

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Not your usual Web

ProPinball: The Web

The Web is everywhere—it's even showing up in the shape of a new pinball game. ProPinball: The Web, Empire Interactive's computer version of the arcade slammer, combines some old and new elements to good effect.

Like its arcade prototype, the Web has only one table, but it delivers some interesting features. Poppers, drop targets, sink holes, grab magnets, and slingshots send the ball to targets or lock the balls for multiball plays.

ProPinball looks fantastic with all the graphic details on, running in Super VGA. And on a Pentium 120, all this eye candy doesn't come at the expense of gameplay.

Multiball play puts your skills to the test.

ProPinball: The Web
Empire Interactive
800-216-9706
www.empire.co.uk

Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486DX/33, 4MB RAM, Super VGA, double-speed CD ROM drive, sound card
List Price: $29.95

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	B

However, ProPinball uses a fixed, three-quarter overhead view, so there are no close-ups to show skill shots (assuming you can make 'em, of course). The game compensates with a useful, albeit lowres, video window at the top of the table. Depending on the special shot you've made, you have to either play in that video window or continue your play at the table level and watch your progress in the video display. The window also prompts you on what to shoot for next.

Otherwise, the game is pretty much your standard silver ball. Its three flippers are sensitive, and the three bumpers at the top of the table pack a fine score—if you use the Tilt feature strategically. You can get a turn-based multiplayer game going with up to four players. And you can choose from several graphics resolutions and table views that allow you to customize the game according to your preferences.

ProPinball is a high scoring game that should please pinball fans. Its good graphics and solid gameplay won't revolutionize computer pinball, but it does maintain the status quo. *—Joy J. Ma*

Tilt! Tilt! Tilt!

Starball

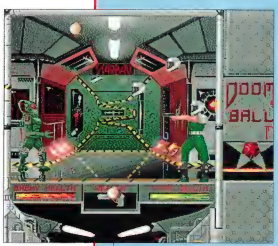
Starball
GameTek
800-426-3835
www.gametek.com

Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486DX/33, MS-DOS 5.0, VGA, double-speed CD-ROM drive, sound card
List Price: $15–$20

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	C-
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	C+

What do you get when you throw some fun animations and a space theme together on a pinball table? Well, you get Starball, a new pinball game from GameTek.

Starball consists of three main tables that are stacked on top of each other. To advance through them, you need to shoot the ball up a small ramp at the top of the screen or nail a skill shot (like shooting the ball into a beetle's mouth) to warp to another table. Skillful players will also find some bonus tables, which include Invaderball, Eggball, Breakball, Doomedball, and a secret bonus screen.

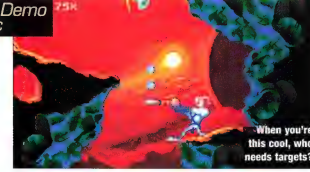


A new kind of Doom awaits you in Starball.

Starball uses the classic vertical-scrolling computer pinball view that can make it hard to aim shots accurately. However, it does bring some new features to the table. Starball's claim to fame is moving targets disguised as missiles, asteroids, and fireballs that rain down as you play. You'll rack up the points if you can hit them with the ball. On the downside, the flippers are not nearly sensitive enough, and may spell doom for your keyboard if it's not extremely durable. I had to slam the shift keys to get the ball to go all the way to the top of the screen, something you'll need to do to advance to different tables. The VGA graphics are adequate and colorful, but not up to the standards set by Super VGA stars such as Virgin's Hyper 3D Pinball.

Another frustrating thing is that you must start every game at the bottom of the ladder and work your way up to the top. So it can take some time to get to one of your favorite tables each time you play. Starball will keep you entertained, but it doesn't stand above the crowd.
—Joy J. Ma

Earthworm Jim 1 & 2: The Whole Can O' Worms



Now here's a superhero who doesn't mess around. To find Princess-What's-Her-Name, his one true love, he'll run, leap, shoot, soar, swing, whip, and swagger his way through some of the strangest places in the galaxy. Look out, worlds—it's hyperkinetic frenzy times ten.

Playmates' new Earthworm Jim compilation is probably about as much sidescrolling action as you can handle, but you'll love coping. Featuring both the original game and its spastic new sequel, the package delivers two platform games that, together, provide some truly bizarre moments. The hero of the stories is Jim, an earthworm-turned-mutant when a spacesuit from the stars lands on his head. As the "annelid with an attitude," your goal in both games is to locate your beloved princess while beating your archnemesis, the vicious Psy-Crow.

Earthworm Jim 1 & 2: The Whole Can O' Worms
Playmates Interactive Entertainment
310-407-1490
www.playmatestoys.com

Developer: Rainbow Art
Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486DX, 8MB RAM, Super VGA, double-speed CD-ROM drive
List Price: $39.99

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	B

After working your way through the first game (see our review in March 1996, page 46), you'll be prepared for Earthworm Jim 2's twisted, cartoon-style levels. Menacing file cabinets and flaming furnaces inhabit ISO 9000, a planet of paperwork. In Level Ate, a nonstop foodfest, you'll hop across tasty salamis and other food, dodging deadly salt shakers and sneaky straws. When you can't avoid your enemies, you can whip them or nail them with one of several different blasters.

Both games liven up the action with colorful, detailed graphics and a soundtrack that's remarkably varied. Earthworm Jim 2 will have you rockin' out one minute and calmed by classical music the next, all amid a barrage of goofy noises. This game's a true Saturday-morning experience.

Compared to each other, Earthworm Jim 1 and 2 are about equal. The original's vertically scrolling bungee jumping beats most of the unique levels in the second game, like the one in which you fly diagonally across the screen a la Zaxxon, but that's a fine point. Separately or in series, these games make for some entertaining arcade-style action. —*Corey Cohen*

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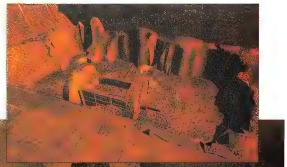
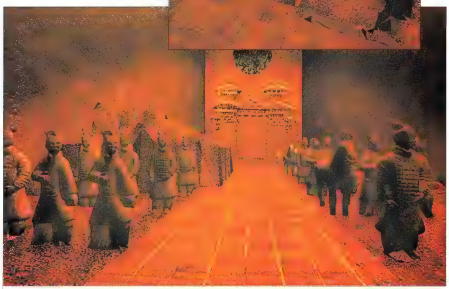
No curses here

Qin: Tomb of the Middle Kingdom

By Barry Brenesal



Beware: The game's puzzles are not for the easily stumped.



Qin's outstanding graphics and slide-show approach are reminiscent of Myst.

Lost, cursed cities of the dead aren't exactly an uncommon feature in books, films, and games. We've been treated for years to tales of Aztec, Mayan, African, Egyptian, Polynesian, and Chinese necropoli—places where wealth and danger await in silence, tempting the unwary into ill-fated boldness.

Qin: Tomb of the Middle Kingdom employs a similar premise, but with some significant twists. For one thing, this place was *real*. Ying Zheng (who called himself Qin Shi Huangdi, First Emperor) created this enormous monument to his ego in the 3rd century B.C., after unifying a Chinese superstate.

When Huangdi died in 210 B.C. he was buried in the huge underground tomb-city known as Qin. Nice guy that he was, Huangdi had himself placed next to all the laborers and artisans who had designed the Qin necropolis over 40 long years and were never allowed to leave. As a finishing touch, the Emperor thrust much of his treasure into the tomb as well. This was one ruler who wanted to take it all with him.

So much for reality. In Qin the game, you are part of an archaeological team unearthing the site, working against real-time events that apparently bespeak the fall of modern-day Chinese civilization. There are no curses to deal with, but the game's producers thoughtfully impede your progress with several intriguing puzzles.

PLAY *the Demo on the disc*

Qin: Tomb of the Middle Kingdom
Time Warner Electronic Publishing
800-759-0190

Platform: Win 95/Win CD
Requires: 8MB RAM, Super VGA, double-speed CD-ROM drive
List Price: $39.95

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	A
OVERALL	B

An engaging, Myst-like adventure based on historical fact and filled with puzzles and visual magic.

Many objects in the genuine Qin burial site are faithfully reproduced in this game, but a judicious amount of touching-up was applied for mood. The overall look and feel resembles Myst, both positively and negatively: incredibly detailed, richly textured, computer-generated screens and a haunting soundtrack are offset by a slide-show approach that jumps from one image to another.

In several important ways, though, Qin parts company with its predecessor. First, this game has an integrated, cross-indexed archive of selected information about ancient China. In addition, you can translate Chinese ideograms by clicking on the Interpreter icon. You'll need this information to solve many of the more than 30 puzzles the game offers. Prepare for a challenge: these puzzles aren't of the fluff variety. They frequently revolve around Chinese cultural concepts such as acupuncture and traditional cosmology.

Qin's art is a breathtaking series of static images that do credit to the artistic sensibilities of the ancient Chinese people and the game producer. The archives, on the other hand, could have used an injection of the same imaginative design. They look staid, and, well, very Windows-like by comparison.

Aesthetics, aesthetics. On the whole, Qin succeeds as both entertainment and education. The adventure-gaming enthusiast who enjoys puzzles is going to like this one, and so is the casual player who prefers side-trips into the exotic. Coming out of left field—or a tomb in Central Asia, at any rate—Qin scores well indeed.

TIPS

• Move your cursor slooowly over all objects on the screen. Some contain hidden recesses or nearly invisible symbols. There's a lever on the throne, for instance, that reveals a secret passage. • Don't neglect the Archive as a source of highly pertinent Chinese cultural information. For example, read up on elements in Chinese cosmology to understand how to escape from the first hall you find yourself within. • You don't like foreign films? Too bad; this is Ancient China, dude, and they wrote in Chinese. Remember to press the interpreter button and click on any ideograms you find. • Check every available direction, and click on anything you find. Because the layout is so vast, be sure to examine your Map icon regularly. It's easy to get turned around in this place.

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Paradise lost

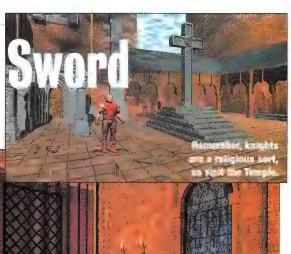
Chronicles of the Sword

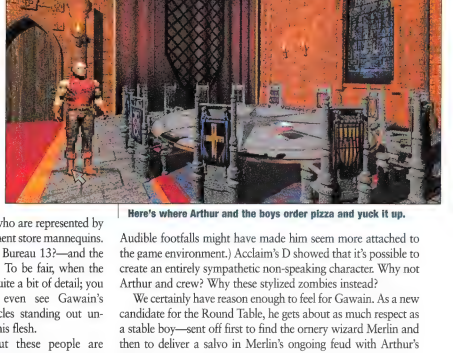
By Peter Olafson

Psygnosis' Arthurian adventure, Chronicles of the Sword, opens with as much promise as Camelot itself.

The great castle is gorgeously rendered in dark browns and grays. The voices are nearly perfect—from Sir Gawain (the hero) right down to the guard outside the evil Morgana's door. The music is effortlessly beautiful and just far enough in the background that it never intrudes. The animation is fluid, the mouse interface is pleasantly simple, and the puzzles, while of the treasure-hunt variety, seem rational enough.

So why, then, did I find this two-CD epic rather cold and unwelcoming?





Here's where Arthur and the boys order pizza and yuck it up.

I suspect it's the on-screen characters, who are represented by the computer-game equivalents of department store mannequins. That's nothing new—remember Hell and Bureau 13?—and the ones here are often shown at a distance. To be fair, when the camera zooms in on them, you'll notice quite a bit of detail; you can even see Gawain's muscles standing out under his flesh.

But these people are still emotionally neutral, exuding about as much warmth as an animatronic Abe Lincoln, and it's hard to enjoy a game when you just don't care about the characters. It makes entertainment feel like work. We slide over Gawain as easily as he slides over the ground. (He doesn't seem quite connected to it. Audible footfalls might have made him seem more attached to the game environment.) Acclaim's D showed that it's possible to create an entirely sympathetic non-speaking character. Why not Arthur and crew? Why these stylized zombies instead?

We certainly have reason enough to feel for Gawain. As a new candidate for the Round Table, he gets about as much respect as a stable boy—sent off first to find the ornery wizard Merlin and then to deliver a salvo in Merlin's ongoing feud with Arthur's half-sister, Morgana. Easier said than done. As you'll see in the intro, Morgana has been up to no good, and soon, she'll be up to worse. Your objective: Secure her undoing.

To that end, you'll send this unanimated animated figure stalking about the depopulated castle and its environs, get to chat with familiar figures (and get some grim rumblings back about what's been going on), and grab mundane objects and put them to good use in widening your horizons. One of the nice things about the game is that you can elicit other characters' opinions on many of the items in your inventory.

Along the way, you'll talk with guard, blacksmith and king, treat with skeletons, faeries, a dragon, and a vampire, and even contend with Morgana and her inventive surrogates. (Remember: Things are not always what they seem.)

For all the variety, some basic problems steal from the fun. Clicking on onscreen hotspots sometimes doesn't take you where you'd expect. I wish the script writers would learn the correct use of "it's" and "its," which are constantly misused. This may be the Britain of the year 420, but Merlin sounds Slavic. Arthur tells Gawain to retrieve an item that he has in his hand.

And the mannequins never bat an eye.

Chronicles of the Sword
Psygnosis
800-438-7794
www.psygnosis.com

Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486DX/66, DOS 5.0, 4MB RAM, Super VGA graphics, sound card
List Price: $49–$55

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	A–
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	A–
OVERALL	C+

A graphically rich but uninspiring Arthurian adventure.

• **The guard outside Morgana's door wants a beer. The beer's at the blacksmith's, but what do you put it in? Have a look under the Round Table.** • **Use the fireplace in the dining room to light the lantern.** • **Under Merlin's tower, have a look in the water.**

Bruce Jenner's World Class

DECATHLON

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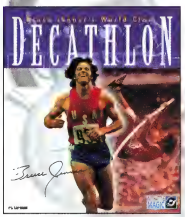
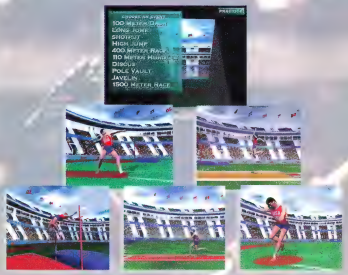


PC CD-ROM



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Goooooooaaaaalll!

VR Soccer '96

By Shane Mooney

VR Soccer offers outstanding visuals—even in close-up views.

No doubt about it, America is a country that refuses to conform. While other nations uniformly praise the singing talents of David Hasselhoff or the sex appeal of hefty French actor Gérard Depardieu (*Green Card*), we Americans are too busy surfing the Net to enjoy the finer things in life.

Take soccer. Known as football in most places, the game pervades just about every culture in the world, and yet we would barely know a World Cup if it came up and kicked us in the shin. But fear not, closet soccer fans: even if you don't get ESPN2 in your neck of the woods, you can experience most of the thrills of the real thing by playing VR Sports' VR Soccer '96, a soccer sim that comes within a goal's reach of being the best on the market.

You won't find high scores here.

Whereas the vast majority of PC soccer games place a heavy emphasis on the arcade elements, with lots of cool shots and ridiculously high-scoring games, VR Soccer '96 does its best to reproduce real soccer. Any true fan of the sport will notice this immediately.

VR Soccer comes with a busload of features: 44 international teams, 22-man squads with up to 8 skill levels per man, and the ability to have 4 players battling it out at the same keyboard (not to mention networking with up to 20 people). And, obviously, it wouldn't be much of a soccer sim if you couldn't customize your World Cup season, team, league, and tournaments.

As you play, an announcer discusses what's going on, not only commenting on the countries on the field, but calling by name the player in control of the ball. Though he's not always on the mark—the announcer will occasionally comment on a team's passing before they've actually done it—the play-by-play adds an extra level of realism and excitement to the game.

But where VR Soccer really shines is in the visual department. VR Sports modeled the movements of its virtual players using video of real professional soccer players. As a result, the Super VGA–rendered action looks extremely realistic. I swore I could tell whether a player was kicking with the side of his foot or with his toes.

If that weren't enough, the game also has what VR Sports calls Virtual FieldVision, which lets you watch the game from any perspective. You can have a free-floating camera that follows the action of the ball, switch to a first-person perspective that allows you to actually become one of the players, or see things from the referee's point of view.

Naturally, you can do instant replays, though I was disappointed to see that they're limited to the last 15 seconds of action—about half of what it should have been. And using the mouse to try to manually change the camera angle during replay was incredibly awkward. After fiddling with it for a while, I just gave up.

Similarly, VR Soccer's heavy emphasis on simulation rather than arcade gaming may disappoint fans of bicycle kicks: you can't do a lot of the more complex moves that you can with EA's FIFA Soccer. Plus, while you get the real players in FIFA, VR Soccer's rosters are fictional.

Keep on playing, though, and you'll find these faults overshadowed by the game's strengths. VR Soccer '96 may not be the absolute best soccer title for real connoisseurs of the game, but it's as close as you're going to get to the Cup without having to wear one.

VR Soccer '96
VR Sports
800-468-3775
http://www.interplay.com

Developer: Gremlin Interactive
Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486DX/33, 4MB RAM, DOS 5.0, mouse, sound card
Street Price: $49.95

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	B

Though not quite as fun as FIFA Soccer, VR Soccer '96 is plenty solid.

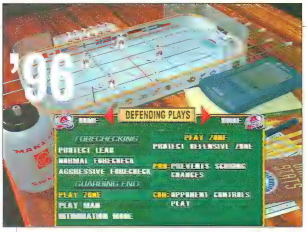
TIPS

- **Don't go rushing in. You're going to have to practice, practice, practice before you can even think about playing another team.**
- **Don't rely on slide tackles for defense; if you miss, you end up getting burned. Just try to contain or run onto the ball.**
- **Don't be a ball hog; you've got to pass if you expect to score. A good strategy is to run the ball up the wings until a square lights up under the player with the ball. When it does, pass to the inside and quickly shoot for a goal.**

NHL Powerplay

By Daniel Morris

Real players, real plays—Powerplay's got 'em.



Finally, a hockey game with a quality coaching system.

TIPS

- **Use home-ice advantage to get the line matchups you want. (You set up last before each faceoff.)**
- **Don't throw checks unless you mean to connect, because if you miss, you'll be taken out of the game.**
- **Hook and hold the puck carrier to hamper his advance. There's no penalty if you take your grabs quickly and smartly.**
- **Tee up the slapshot from the point, then look for rebounds in the crease.**
- **Don't get too pretty. You'll be punished for making one pass too many.**

NHL Powerplay '96
Virgin Interactive Entertainment
800-874-4607
www.vie.com

Developer: Radical Entertainment
Platform: Win 95 CD
Requires: 486DX/66, 8MB RAM, Win 95, 1MB video RAM
List Price: $49.95

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	B

Super artificial intelligence and detailed realism make NHL Powerplay one to watch among hockey newcomers.

Considering the juggernaut that Electronic Arts' NHL series presents to anyone trying to make a name for themselves in hockey games, Virgin's meticulous effort, courtesy of its Radical Entertainment sports line, should at least make a big splash in the hockey pond.

NHL Powerplay '96 features the most faithful replication of actual NHL play of any computer game. Whether it's the best of the hockey games is another matter entirely, but it's won the realism face-off. Playing this game feels like watching an NHL contest, with all the good and bad implications therein. This is gritty, detail-oriented hockey. Ugly goals outnumber pretty passing plays. Stifling D forces your finesse guys to dump and chase. High-flying goalfests are a pipe dream; this is the real deal.

The major stride made here is in the artificial intelligence (AI), which has been the downfall of many hockey games. Gamers who have weathered the past three or four years of decidedly so-so hockey AI know this all too well. Senselessly spinning defensemen, linemates perpetually offside—every player has a long list of pet peeves about the often inexplicable antics of computer-controlled skaters.

But the AI in Powerplay is extraordinary, and the programmers at Radical deserve a stick-pounding salute for their achievement. Gone are the unchallenged coast-to-coast drives by guys on the checking line. Even the superstars work hard for their opportunities. Defensemen cover their checking assignments. Passing lanes get clogged up with sticks and skates. Forwards collapse into the slot to deny the one-timer passes that make scoring a yawn in many other games.

As a result, scoring a goal actually prompts you to pump your fist in celebration, and maybe even talk a little trash to the goalie. It's an accomplishment! And with Gravis GrIP support, all the Hansen brothers can go at it at once.

The action's so real, it may even be a little disappointing for those eager to match their buddies breakaway for breakaway. Folks who love the highlight reels may get bleary-eyed during the grinding, punishing trench wars that occupy most of a game's running time.

One thing I noticed was that I was winning a disproportionate amount of games with inferior teams. I took my beloved Sharks to a 13-4-1 start in league play, which shouldn't happen.

Also, the graphics here aren't quite up to EA's standard: everything's blockier. On the other hand, the player animations are more lifelike, the skating more authentic, the checks a little less theatrical, the faceoffs more elaborately choreographed. But a compromise is necessary between resolution and frame-rate: at high-res settings, there are noticeable hiccups in play.

There are also some things missing from Powerplay that many (myself included) consider essentials in a PC sports title—comprehensive statistics and general-manager functions. You'll find no season stats to follow, no league leaders to track, and no trades to be made. There's also no create-player feature.

Nevertheless, until Powerplay, a coaching system hasn't been adequately incorporated into a PC hockey game, and teams played exactly the same style of hockey. Powerplay allows budding bench-pacers to tailor and tweak their defensive and offensive schemes, including breakouts, forechecking pressure, and pinching defensemen. It adds a new and involving dimension to the contest: the decisions matter, and are translated onto the ice.

With EA entrenched as the team to beat in this league and NHL '97 on the way, Powerplay doesn't yet have what it'll take to claim the hockey throne. But it's a very encouraging first entry and holds solid promise for the near future. Consider it a blue-chip draft pick.

For die-hards only

Vikings

By David Israels

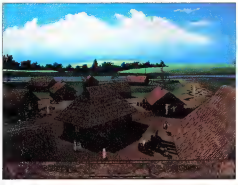
Vikings is a veritable mixing pot of game genres, combining strategy, role-playing, arcade, real-time, and turn-based elements. Unfortunately, the resultant stew is surprisingly flavorless.

The premise seems promising enough. Vikings is set in the brave old world of 9th-century Europe. It begins with the death of your father, the valiant Jarl (leader) of your province who was recently struck down in battle.

As the new Jarl of a single province in one of three Scandinavian kingdoms, it's your job to…well, that's the game's first problem. Its publisher, GT Interactive, chose to equip you with nothing more than an uninformative 20-page jewel box insert. This self-proclaimed "manual" fails to tell you that the goal of the game is to conquer up to 160 provinces. How do you accomplish that? Again, the manual doesn't explain that you need only capture each province's capital city.

Vikings' graphics are nothing to write home about.

The odd mixture of design elements may also leave players scratching their heads. The combination of strategy and role playing is the least perplexing: the game is primarily a case of explore and conquer. But it also includes rudimentary role-playing activities such as quests and the garnering of experience points and reputation levels through combat.



Narrator Michael Dorn will give you an earful about each of the game's locales.

There are also naval clashes that involve little more than maneuvering your vessel with the mouse as you pound the spacebar to shoot arrows at the enemy. It's so goofy, I kinda liked it. But if you happen to ram into your opponent's ship, you're forced to indulge in another horrible round of hand-to-hand fighting.

Visually, Vikings seems terribly undernourished. Many of the graphics consist of nothing more than static screens, some of which have hot spots that reveal information as you pass your cursor over them.

The flat, 2-D world map is just as lifeless. Rendered with anemic land masses, oceans, and cities, its only animation consists of a single fighter walking around the land or a single ship sailing the seas. Navigating those figures is pretty weird because they move continuously; the only control you have is to point them in a certain direction. To stop, you have to run them into an obstruction.

The game's sound is both less than you would expect and more than you want. As you explore, you get tinny music—no sound effects. In combat you hear minimal battle sounds. Enter a city, however, and you're subjected to seemingly endless speeches from narrator Michael Dorn (*Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine's* Worf). The wordy descriptions could help break the monotony, because there's nothing much to look at in that part of the game, but chances are, you'll want to turn them off.

Upon finishing this review, I happily deleted Vikings from my hard drive. If you're smart, you won't let this strange Norse concoction discover your computer in the first place.

TIPS

- **You can defeat a larger enemy force by maneuvering your leader next to the enemy leader. If you can win a hand-to-hand fight, you'll win the battle.**
- **Fight often to boost your reputation—more people will answer your call for troops, and it will be easier to extort money from other leaders. • Increasing your experience raises your chances of winning battles.**

Vikings
GT Interactive
800-610-4847

Developer: Random Games
Platform: Win/Mac CD
Requires: 486/33, 8MB RAM, Win 3.1, Super VGA, double-speed CD-ROM drive, sound card
List Price: $39.95

GAMEPLAY:	D
GETTING STARTED:	D-
GRAPHICS:	D+
SOUND CHECK:	D
OVERALL	D

This ambitious but underdeveloped game is sure to disappoint would-be Vikings.

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PC CD-ROM

This is one deadline you can miss

PLAY the Demo on the disc

Deadline

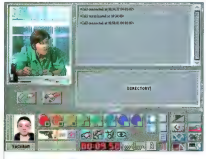
By Barry Brenesal

Wanted: Better graphics and more mission variety.

Real-time strategy games have become quite popular thanks to the likes of Command and Conquer, Jagged Alliance, Breach III, and Dune II. All combine some aspects of strategic building and resource management with tactical action among individual fighting units. Now Deadline joins the fray.

You can tell Deadline is a British-based assault game in a few not-so-subtle ways. The accents on the solid video footage, for instance, are a dead giveaway. And in true British fashion, you head an M5-style government agency, the Anti-Terrorist Division (ATD), rather than a merry band of mercenaries-for-hire or an independent international consortium.

Of course, that influences the game's economy and planning elements. As a government agency, you won't need to research confiscated items for manufacture and resale as you did in X-COM, or harvest medicinal sap to buy better mercs a la Jagged Alliance. Do you crave that fancy Uzi, or just a good old-fashioned flamethrower? Move to the Requisitions screen and place your order.



Deadline isn't all about fighting.

On the other hand, being a government employee has its disadvantages. If your boss, the enigmatic B, finds that you're gathering too many supplies for any given mission, your request for additional supplies will be turned down. In most games you'd just file another form, but in Deadline, you're working against the clock. Every order you make, fact you research, or call you place (for a computer hacker or electrical supplier, for instance) leeches more valuable time from the final, action part of your mission.

Yes, the title Deadline really says it all. You can't just choose the deadliest operatives and send them for quiche while strategizing about equipment, terrain, negotiations, etc. A digital clock starts ticking down the moment you're handed one of the 17 available missions. The terrorists are punctual type-A personalities, and when Zero Hour hits, they'll achieve their objectives if you don't stop them first.

Fortunately, your squad members are pretty smart—click on a man and drag him to a door, and he'll open it, enter, attack, and subdue whoever is armed and dangerous on the other side. You can set your men for autonomous mode, force them to follow your instructions when given, or control them completely. You can also manipulate their aggression levels, selecting from passive, capture, incapacitate, or eliminate. If you like, you can create an icon symbolizing a group you define, then use it to send them all running to a given destination with orders in hand.

What if you fail? You're offered the chance to restart your last mission. That's all. You can't redefine the amount of time available to complete the mission (though, in some missions, negotiating successfully with the terrorists by phone will help). Another negative is the absence of extensive options for your squad members. They can crouch and stand, use, look, capture, and escort, but they can't run or aim.

Unfortunately, the missions are unimaginative—they range from rescuing hostages from an office building seized by terrorists to rescuing a radio station seized by terrorists—and they get stale pretty quick. Furthermore, they're exactly the same each time you play, so the game's replay value is low.

Deadline's visuals don't live up to the rest of the product either. The artwork is way below average, particularly in its use of color and shading, and the animation is jerky.

Hard-core real-time strategy gamers may enjoy Deadline for some of the new elements it brings to the genre. But if you want excellent graphics, in-depth strategic fighting options, and heavily randomized scenarios each time you play, look to the X-COM and Jagged Alliance series instead.

Strategy Tips

- **Minimum violence is a key to victory: your government wants to seem friendly, efficient, and benign.**
- **It's possible to succeed in your immediate mission objective but still fail because of excessive damage to enemies, victims, and real estate.**
- **Several buttons let you sort the pool of potential team members by area of professional competence. Use these every time you're handed a new mission to choose the best people in the shortest amount of time.**
- **Use calls to outsiders to gain useful advantages: negotiate for extra time, get the electrical supplier to kick off the lights, or get the hacker to destroy computer access.**
- **Save often. The missions become very difficult very fast.**

Deadline
Vic Tokai
310-326-8880
www.victokai.com

Developer: Millennium
Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486/66, 8MB RAM, DOS 6.0, double-speed CD-ROM drive, mouse, sound card
List Price: $38–$44

GAMEPLAY:	C-
GETTING STARTED:	C-
GRAPHICS:	C-
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	C-

Deadline offers role playing and real-time action, but it's dogged by poor graphics and some overly similar missions.

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Mystery Word Grid

		H				MYSTERY WORD
			E			
P	I	N	C	H	W	
		R				
S						

WORD LIST and LETTER CODE chart

PINCH .....W	PRESS.....K	BLAST .....A	WRECK.....D
BREAK.....Z	PUNCH.....S	SPRAY C	TURBO.....V
STOMP .....T	STAND.....R	PRESS .....E	DREAM....O
CRUSH.....I	SCORE .....H	SLANT L	CHASE.....P

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No more kid's stuff

Manic Karts

Sometimes small isn't just beautiful, it's fun. Take Virgin's Manic Karts, a small-circuit racing game whose accessibility is matched only by its challenge.

This follow-up to 1995's Super Karts, developed by Williams and distributed by GT Interactive, adheres to the basic arcade principles of the original game by keeping things pleasantly uncomplicated, while beefing up the graphics and realism.

Not that there was anything wrong with Super Karts. But it was decidedly lightweight. With its cartoony characters and power-ups, it skirted Super Mario Karts territory.

A solid, simple, and fun arcade racer.

Manic Karts
Virgin Interactive Entertainment
800-874-4607
www.vie.com

Developer: Manic Media
Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486DX/33, DOS 6.0, 8MB RAM, VGA, double-speed CD-ROM drive
List Price: $34.95

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B

Manic Karts dispenses with those kid-oriented features: This is go-kart racing, pure and simple. You pick from among 16 international tracks and are set down on the starting grid alongside seven rivals. Then you bump and skid your way to the finish.

The tracks tend to be short and sweet, but it'll be all you can do to keep up with the pack and stay clear of obstacles: The other drivers are very good, and you can't adjust the game's difficulty level. Each course is rife with detours and entangling road-side scenery.

Manic Karts strikes a good balance. It's still lightweight—it is a go-karting game, after all. But it's fundamentally sound, reasonably realistic, and easy to play. Sensibly, English developer Manic Media choose not to follow in the draft of MicroProse's laborious Virtual Karts sim. Go-kart racing just isn't taken that seriously here in the good ol' USA.

Indeed, the only conspicuous problem I noticed—aside from my own bad habit of taking hairpin turns way too fast—was perspective correction. When you're close by, the walls will occasionally appear to warp outward. Fortunately, there's a work-around: Keep your eyes on the road, and step on it! —*Peter Olafson*

PC GAMES A LIST

More is better

Warcraft II: Beyond The Dark Portal

Trite but true: If you liked Warcraft II, you're bound to like the Warcraft II expansion set. You hardly have any choice. Beyond the Dark Portal is simply more of Warcraft II: 24 new scenarios arranged in Human- and Orc-centered storylines, 50 new PUDS (maps) to play with, and some sensible (if minor) improvements and repairs to the game engine.

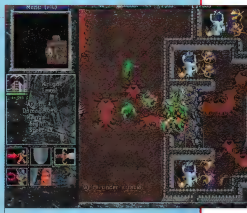
The Humans have blown up the portal linking the Orcish world to their own, but that seems to have amounted to merely knocking the screen door off its hinges. They haven't eliminated the rift that makes Orc immigration possible, and that door swings both ways.

So off we go on a campaign at once new and naggingly familiar. All the significant particulars of Warcraft II gameplay remain in force. You're handed the reins of a basic economy—collecting gold, lumber, and oil—and must use it to build and maintain an army in the face of overwhelming opposition. Invariably, this is trickier than it looks.

Those of you who haven't played Warcraft II, the top-selling game of the first quarter of 1996, are missing a real treat. If J. R. R. Tolkien had written Command & Conquer, it might have played something like this. I love the lithe mouse interface, the dopey retorts from your subjects, the deep colors, the rich explosions of sound, the small but endearing details, and the big, bruising tableau.

But this isn't the place to start. Like most add-ons—including C&C's Covert Operations—Dark Portal is aimed at the veteran player, and the difficulty level takes a serious jump almost immediately. The first Human scenario is deceptively simple; the second is an absolute killer.

So come for the Warcraft II and stay for Beyond the Dark Portal. You may not be surprised, but you won't be disappointed. —*Peter Olafson*



Strike deep into the heart of the Orcs' homeworld.

Warcraft II: Beyond the Dark Portal
Blizzard Entertainment
800-953-7669
www.blizzard.com

Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486/33, 8MB RAM, DOS 5.0, Super VGA, full version of Warcraft II
List Price: $30

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	A
OVERALL	A

No Temple of Doom

Indiana Jones and His Desktop Adventures

Call me spoiled, but when a company comes out with such brilliant classics as TIE Fighter, Full Throttle, and Dark Forces, I expect more than the mediocrity found in the latest LucasArts offering, Indiana Jones and His Desktop Adventures.

As you may have guessed, you play Indiana Jones as he traipses through the jungles of Mexico in the 1930s. From a top-down perspective you guide your tiny desktop Indy around a simple randomly generated map, looking for randomly chosen objects or people assigned in the beginning of the game. You have to pick up valuable objects, trade for information, and fend off countless spiders, scorpions, and Nazis (oh my!).

At a loss as to what to do next? The locals will point you in the right direction.

Indiana Jones and His Desktop Adventures
LucasArts
800-985-8227
www.lucasarts.com

Platform: Win 3.1/Win 95
Requires: 486/33, 8MB RAM, Win 3.1 or Win 95, Super VGA
List Price: $18.95

GAMEPLAY:	C-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	C
SOUND CHECK:	C-

OVERALL: C-

The game uses a proprietary technology that'll create a new map, slightly different puzzles, and one of 15 different quests each time you play—all of which has the title bragging about "billions of possible games." Though I imagine the number of times I played falls a bit short of that number, I think I'm able to give a fair evaluation based on what I saw. From that, I'd be hard pressed to play a hundred times, much less a billion.

Why? Well, instead of smooth-scrolling animated characters, you're treated to still pictures that the computer jumps around on the screen to simulate movement. And, despite the plethora of different game possibilities, when you're dealing with so few variables, the games tend to get a bit redundant. The only things that really change are the types of items to find and where they're located. Technically, Indiana Jones is different the first dozen times, but after that you get a funny feeling of "déjà vu all over again." Low price aside, this game should have been better.

—Shane Mooney

One for the bargain bin

Spud

Spud
GameTek
800-426-3835
www.gametek.com

Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486/50, 4MB RAM, double-speed CD-ROM drive, mouse, sound card
List Price: $29.95

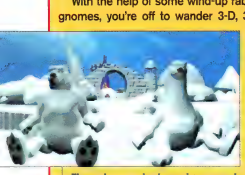
GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	C-
SOUND CHECK:	C

OVERALL: C-

A surfer rabbit, edgy penguins, and gun-toting reindeer have never really struck me as the best ingredients for a good adventure game. After playing Spud, my feelings haven't changed a whole lot.

Spud, billed as a "comic adventure game," is the kind of game whose very premise leaves you hoping for hidden charm. You, young Spud, are on a quest to free your mysterious grandfather from the evil Dr. Chillblane. Chillblane plans to rule the world with the help of grandpa's toy-making machinery, and you're the only one who can stop him.

With the help of some wind-up rabbits and handy little gnomes, you're off to wander 3-D, 360-degree environments—mansions, the Arctic, a tropical island, and more. Being able to swivel fully around definitely helps immerse you in the game, but the shortage of interactive elements keeps you distant. As you move about in giant steps, doing the usual pointing-and-clicking, you'll get little entertainment from your surroundings.



These dopey polar bears have a real mean streak.

Luckily, the game's puzzles are fairly straightforward, and at times, even fun. Mix the toolbox you found with one of your gnomes, and you get a repairman who can fix a broken mine cart. To kill a dragon, combine one of your bunnies with some explosive elements. Burrrpppp…Boom!

The sad part is that what you'd think would elevate this game, doesn't. Spud's warped sensibility has potential, but the oddball mix of kid and adult humor simply fails. Many of the jokes—cracks involving NutraSweet, *The Godfather*, and some jive-talking monkeys—are severely dated, if not offensive. Thankfully, your conversations are brief, but it's always a bummer listening to a would-be comedian who's not very funny.

As it stands, Spud's a decent adventure with some really lame humor. With so many better adventure games out there, this one belongs in the bargain bin.

—Corey Cohen

Conquest of the New World

By Shane Mooney

Battles are like chess matches—take your time.

Anyone can don a coonskin cap and call himself an explorer, but you need a little savvy to survive and prosper. Never has this been more apparent than in Interplay's Conquest of the New World. When you're not busy exploring the precious land, you have to deal with hostile competitors and keeping the Mother Country happy at all times.

Choosing Sides

Your first task is to decide where your loyalties lie. You may not realize this, but the only difference among the various European countries for human players is the color of the flags. However, there is a difference if you choose to play as Native Americans. On the positive side, you're allowed more movement points for the same-level units, your initial colonies are larger, your rate of growth is faster, and you can absorb more damage during a raid. Also, you don't have to worry about appeasing the Mother Country with taxes.

On the other hand, you don't produce any artillery, your farms are less productive, and you'll earn considerably fewer points for establishing a "federated" tribe than you would for a European commonwealth.

When you play against the computer, which side you choose should depend at least partly on the strategy you like to use. If you prefer to gain your points through exploration and discovery, playing as France or Spain will pit you against less exploratory colonies, and thus, lower the competition. If you'd rather gain victory points by establishing successful colonies, you should opt to be British or Dutch.

Take Charge

In the beginning it's always best to guide your explorers yourself. Send each of your first four explorers off in different directions. That way, you'll be more likely to find valuable mountain peaks and rivers early on.

You should also send one of your two ships to explore the coastline of the new continent. Keep the other one in port in case you want to send troops or a Settler to a new colony location.

When you want to establish a colony, find a site that has a flat plain and forests, and is located near mountains and the ocean. Although it isn't absolutely necessary to build near mountains, gold is critical to a successful game, and you'll find some fairly productive mines near the mountains. By using them, you'll be spared the hassle of having to trade for gold early in the game. You'll also want a little bit of prime farmland for your first colony, so it'll have plenty of food and, more importantly, will be able to pay its taxes.

If you're playing a solitaire game and you can't find a good location for your first colony, you might want to consider starting over—it's that important.

For a change of pace, play as the Native Americans.

Wheelin' and Dealin'

Your colonies will rarely have everything they need, so you'll have to trade if you expect to progress. Generally, you'll need only one dock per city to take care of all your trading needs. Also, try to conduct trades with Natives every turn, especially instantaneous trades (for wood or other crucial raw materials). This will build up your colony quickly.

The worst deals you can make involve trading with the Mother Country before you become a commonwealth or attain independence, when you'll get a much better shake. Because of variances in the exchange rate, you might even want to eventually use the Mother Country as your exclusive source for gold, especially if you're producing goods with high-level commerce buildings for maximum efficiency.

Following these tactics will get your budding colony on the road to world domination. Of course, to be successful, you'll have to master other tasks, such as diplomacy and combat. Be patient and meticulous. You'll find that taking the time to explore all the strategies you can use in the New World is half the fun of conquering it.

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Smash the Cybrids with these PC Games hints.

MissionForce:

By Shane Mooney

The protoplasm Biodermes that you're given at the outset are pretty much worthless. Recycle them as soon as you can afford something better.

Playing MissionForce: Cyberstorm is a lot like playing a futuristic game of EarthSiege chess. Unfortunately, many Herc generals tend to think that all of MissionForce's strategy takes place on the battlefield, when in fact they make many of their most important moves at the Herc base.

For example, you must carefully choose Bioderms, Hercs, and weapons specifically geared for each mission. After all, you don't want to stock your Hercs with a ton of energy weapons to take to a planet where lasers don't work. The following tips will help you rid the universe of the Cybrid threat once and for all.

Start Slow

Go on the first training mission! It's such a cakewalk that it may seem like a waste of time, but it's an easy way of getting your first promotion. Plus, if you don't complete the mission, it'll continue to take up a slot in the Herc Command Center that could be better used by a fortune-making mining mission or promotion-promising military assignment.

When you get back, consider recycling your protoplasm 'derms and getting something with at least a modicum of talent, like a Khadisha. Also, it'd be a good idea to put a Maxim Ore Extractor on your two Hercs for the next couple of mining missions.

Hit the Mines

Now select a propitious mining mission from the Herc Command Center. Make sure it doesn't have much of a Cybrid threat and try to avoid planets that can really slow you down, like those with icy terrain. After you've found and destroyed the Cybrids there, mine the planet for all she's worth—or at least get the 500 units needed to fulfill the mission objective. If you nab the goodies and destroy all the Cybrids on the planet, you'll get an Automining bonus to go with your bounty for the Cybrids and money for the ore.

Once you've gone on two mining missions, take your money and get the most Herc for your buck, and the best Bioderms you can afford. Remember, three great Bioderms are better than six mediocre ones. Try to get a fleet of the highest level Herc you have access to. It's also a good idea to have one Ghost Shadow to use as a quick, nimble scout.

Don't get greedy and go on too many mining missions before taking on a military mission. If you waste too much time on mining mission after mining mission, you'll suddenly run into a lot of very nasty Cybrids. Choose two, maybe three mining missions and then a military mission, especially if you want to get promotions.

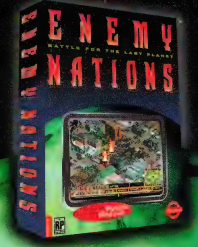
Don't squander resources on weapons that are ineffective on the planets you're going to—do some research. If you go where the EM fields render energy-based weapons useless, buy something else.

Concentrate Firepower

When you do confront multiple Cybrids, focus all of your forces on one bad guy at a time. That way, you can destroy him before he can regenerate his shields. Have your Hercs take out the Cybrid's shields with lasers and then let the rest of your team lob missiles to destroy him completely.

The most important thing to remember is that there are many different approaches to a successful campaign in MissionForce. The whole idea of the game is to find the strategy that works best for you and repeat it until you succeed in ruining the Cybrids' master plan.

Meet interesting people on the Internet, then build big tanks and show the bastards who's boss.



Now that you've landed on the last planet, all you have to do is feed your people, power your city, fuel your economy, deploy your army and destroy *Enemy Nations*... before they destroy you.

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Strategy & Tactics

If you can't beat 'em—cheat!

MechWarrior 2: Ghost Bear's Legacy

Restore honor to Clan Ghost Bear with these devastating codes.

During gameplay, press Ctrl-Alt-Shift and type:

BURR: Turns off heat tracking
CLARK: Gives you X-ray vision
DORCS: Meet the programmers
JUMBO: Gives you jump jets
KABOOM: Destroys all mechs
KENT: Makes you invincible
PALEX: Kills targeted mech
PUTZ: Ends mission successfully
SPEEDYGONZALES: Enables time-compression key
TIK: Turns on collision-bounding spheres

Dear PC Games,

Would you please publish some codes for Warcraft: Orcs & Humans, the best Warcraft game I own? I'm buying the sequel to a game it's finished to pre-decimate, and I'm planning on burning Tides of Darkness as soon as I break this note, even if it means choking a kobi. Thanks. Not much help.

Kyle Hall
Atlantic, PA

No problem, Kyle. With the recent release of the Warcraft II add-on, you'll want to start on the second game immediately. Type these codes during gameplay to blaze through the original:

ORCx or HUMANx (where "x" is a number from 1 to 12): Jumps you to that scenario in the campaign
YOURS TRULY: Takes you to the victory sequence of any level
CRUSHING DEFEAT: Takes you to the loss sequence of any level
IDES OF MARCH: Takes you to the final sequence of the campaign you're in
POT OF GOLD: Adds 10,000 gold and 5,000 lumber to your resources
EYE OF NEWT: Gives your magic users all spells
IRON FORGE: Upgrades all technologies immediately
SALLY SHEARS: Displays the entire map area
HURRY UP GUYS: Builds all buildings, units, and upgrades at an accelerated rate
THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE: All of your units are invulnerable to everything but a direct catapult hit, and they will inflict 255 damage points on each enemy they hit

I have heard that there are WAD files on the 11th Hour disc 1 that let you play Doom in the Stauf mansion. How do you use these WADs?

Andrew Oberst
Address unavailable

Actually, the 11th Hour disc 1 contains WADs for Doom, Doom II (shown above), and Heretic—a damn cool idea, if you ask us. To use the WADs, follow these easy steps:

(1) Install Doom, Doom II, and/or Heretic on your hard drive. (You thought you could play the WADs without owning the games? Sorry.)

(2) Load the 11th Hour disc in your disc drive. Put STAUF.WAD and STAUFMUS.WAD in your hard drive's Doom folder, STAUF2.WAD in your Doom II folder, and STAUFH.WAD in your Heretic folder.

(3) Type a command line reflecting the game and WAD you want to play—e.g., C:\DOOM>DOOM -FILE STAUF.WAD or C:\HERETIC>HERETIC -FILE STAUFH.WAD.

That's it—you're ready to blast your way through a monster-filled version of Stauf's mansion.

Total Mayhem

It's you and your cyborgs against a world of killer 'bots. Use these white-bot codes to storm the enemy stronghold and rid the Earth of those friggin' machines.

To activate Cheat Mode, go to the base screen, hold down Shift and Ctrl, and type CHEAT. Now you can enter the following codes:

Ctrl-N: Skips to the next level
Ctrl-A: Gives you access to all weapons and powerups (you still have to buy them, but you don't have to find them)
Ctrl-C: Gives you 1,000 credits. Use this option over and over to get lots of money.

In-game Cheats:

Ctrl-P: Moves the activated soldier to the location of the cursor
Ctrl-R: Restores all of your shields and health
Ctrl-I: Makes you indestructible
Ctrl-M: Turns off all monsters
Ctrl-Shift and typing STUFF gives you one of each item

Is a certain game driving you nuts? Can't figure out how to kill an enemy, solve a puzzle, or find a key? We can help! Send your questions to *PC Games*, Attn: Strategy & Tactics, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; fax: 415-349-7482; e-mail: ccohen@ifw.com

Compiled by Corey Cohen

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By Christine Grech Wendin

Visual Boom Boxes

Given a choice of PC speakers, most gamers would opt for the pricey, three-piece subwoofer systems produced by Cambridge SoundWorks, Altec Lansing, and others. In reality, though, a lot of us may not have enough green to actually buy these bass machines, so we have to make do with something else—often the small squawkers that came bundled with our computers.

But what if you happen to be upgrading another key component of your PC, making the glorious jump from a puny 14- or 15-inch monitor to a comfortable 17-incher? Should you consider one of the new breed of "multimedia monitors" that integrate speakers into the display unit?

Surprisingly, the answer may be yes, depending upon the quality of your existing audio system, your budget, and space constraints. We looked at five name-brand monitors, each of which combines a 17-inch display and speakers into a single box. All the monitors support 1024-by-768 resolution with a minimum refresh rate of 75Hz, and they range in price from $699 to $999—about $100 more than you'd pay for a comparable 17-inch monitor without speakers. We tested the monitors on a Pentium 166 equipped with an STB Powergraph 64 video card; we ran audio CDs, great-sounding games like Duke Nukem 3D, great-looking games like Timelapse, and those that shine in both departments, like Zork: Nemesis.

We found that one of the pluses to using a multimedia monitor is that you cut down on the tangle of cords snaking their way across your desk, and you save space because you no longer have to make room for the optimal positioning of your satellite speakers. While the monitors we looked at vary in the positioning of their speakers, from the sides and bottom of the frame to underneath the monitor, they are all optimized for a single listener. These small 1.5- to 2-watt speakers won't flood a room with Zork's eerie soundtrack, but with the volume cranked up, they will help draw you into the experience. Several of the monitors do this by offering various sound modes, including one that simulates stereo from mono sound and one that's optimized for games.

And who says you have to do without the pumping bass of a three-piece speaker system? The new Nokia 447Xav comes with a subwoofer built right into the monitor! Here's how it compared to the rest of the field.

MultiSync M700

Rating: A-

The NEC name has long been synonymous with high-quality monitors, and the company's new MultiSync M700 follows in that

NEC MultiSync M700: Crisp picture, respectable sound.

tradition, taking top honors in our tests. There was little we didn't like about it: picture-quality was crisp and rich thanks to new ChromaClear technology, and the sound was respectable, especially when running in Music/Game mode. And NEC paid attention to all the important details, including providing the required audio cables, positioning a mute button on the front controls, and even throwing in a Mac adapter. Add to that the M700's sleek, compact design, and it's hard to pass up, even though it's the second most expensive of the lot.

On the sound side, the M700 doesn't just integrate its 2-watt speakers on the lower front of the box and call itself a multimedia monitor. Instead, it adds extras that would be welcome on a stand-alone set of PC speakers. You can choose from four sound modes: Voice/Standard, Music/Game, Movie TV, and Mono to Stereo. Music/Game mode really made a difference on all the games we played. Gunfire in Duke Nukem, for example, sounds like it's really coming at you, whereas it's muffled and farther away when played in Standard mode.

NEC gives another nod to games with its Video Window feature, which brightens up the screen (or just the video-window area that you specify) for easier viewing. While it didn't blow our socks off, it did make a discernible difference.

With all this functionality packed in one box, controls play a vital role in all of these monitors. The M700 does a good job, but there's still room for improvement in its on-screen-menuing (OSM) system. Making some adjustments requires you to use the Proceed button to move to the next submenu, which isn't always intuitive. More annoying is the fact that the OSM doesn't stay onscreen very long, and when you reactivate it, you must start over at the opening screen.

But you'll probably be so dazzled by this monitor's amazing sights and sounds that you won't mind these minor problems. (NEC Technologies; 800-632-4636; **www.nec.com**; PC/Mac; $899)

Nokia 447Xav: A monitor with a subwoofer?

ILLUSTRATION BY ANTHONY LARSEN

Nokia 447Xav

Rating: B

Our second-place finisher was the Nokia 447Xav—a surprising favorite. Not that we didn't think the picture quality would be up to snuff, as a Nokia monitor has been our choice for the Hardware Hall of Fame (page 91) for the past three months, but because we were skeptical about the 10-watt subwoofer. Wouldn't it somehow interfere with the picture quality? How effective could it be sitting there in the base of the monitor stand?

Our findings? The 447Xav's picture quality is outstanding and its sound is respectable, though we didn't notice much difference in audio compared to the subwooferless NEC.

We weren't as pleased by the absence of audio cords with any of Nokia's multimedia monitors. Because of this oversight, users will have to run out to Radio Shack and pick up a red-and-white RCA jack before they can hear anything. To be fair, the company gets points for the unique environmental packing it uses with the 447Xav (but not the 447W).

Like the NEC, Nokia lets you choose among four audio modes: Mono, Stereo, Pseudo Stereo, and Spatial Stereo. The latter, like NEC's Music/Game mode, really pumps up the sound in games. On the graphics side, you can opt for Contrast mode, which helped picture clarity in Zork while muddying things up in Timelapse. As with all of the monitors, you'll have to experiment with settings to get the optimal image. (Don't worry, though—all of the monitors we looked at have a default mode for returning you to the factory settings if you get too carried away.)

The Xav rates adequately when it comes to controls, though a default mute button (instead of making you program it in) would have been a nice touch. And the manual is slim in the help department.

With a price tag of almost $1,000, the Xav is no bargain, especially since you can get similar audio effects from the subwooferless NEC. But if you want the coolest monitor on the block, check it out. (Nokia; 800-296-6542; **www.nokia.com**; PC/Mac; $999)

Nokia 447W

Rating: B-

A step down from the Xav is Nokia's 447W, which omits the subwoofer and uses a different picture tube, but costs $200 less. And you still don't get audio cables. That said, the 447W still comes through with a good picture and decent sound, even at top volume.

Nokia 447W: You get what you pay for.

While the Xav's speakers are front-mounted on the lower frame of the monitor, the W's are located beneath the monitor, the space used by the Xav's subwoofer. Even so, the W has decent sound, though it lacks the fullness of the Xav's Spatial Stereo mode.

The rest of the package is more of the same, duplicating the control scheme (lacking a number of menu items, of course), sparse documentation, and useful Contrast graphics mode of the higher-end 447Xav.

Nokia's lower-cost effort is respectable, but to really get the most out of a multimedia monitor, we recommend you pay the premium for the kind of special sound effects featured in the Nokia 447Xav and the NEC M700. (Nokia; 800-296-6542; **www.nokia.com**; PC/Mac; $799)

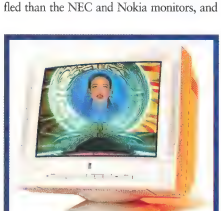
Viewsonic 17GA

Rating: C

One of two Viewsonic multimedia monitors that we looked at, the 17GA offered hit-and-miss performance. Visually, it delivers a good picture, though not quite as sharp as the NEC's or Nokia Xav's. Another plus: Like the NEC, it has a useful Video mode that lightens up the screen, allowing easier viewing of video-intensive games.

The 17GA's audio quality isn't very noteworthy. Overall, the unit sounded more muffled than the NEC and Nokia monitors, and didn't crank out enough volume to get our blood pumping in Duke. To its credit, the 17GA provides the best volume-control scheme: you can turn it up or down or mute it from the controls on the front of the monitor, rather than having to activate an onscreen menuing system.

Unfortunately, the rest of the controls, which are onscreen, aren't so easy or intuitive, especially the crude icons that represent the different adjustments you can make. Spend the extra money and get yourself the NEC. (Viewsonic; 800-888-8583; **www.viewsonic.com**; PC/Mac; $799)



Viewsonic 17GA: Hit-and-miss performance.

Viewsonic 17EA: Cheap speakers and a ho-hum picture.

Viewsonic 17EA

Rating: C-

Viewsonic's budget offering, the lowest-priced monitor in our roundup, is exactly what we expected from a unit with integrated speakers: add some cheap speakers to a ho-hum monitor and call it multimedia.

The 17EA's picture quality is adequate, but not quite up to the quality of the other four monitors in our tests, partly due to its having the highest dot pitch (.28mm between each pixel versus .27mm in the GA and .25mm in the NEC and Nokia models). It also differs from its higher-priced sibling in that it lacks a built-in microphone, powers its speakers with 1.5 watts instead of 2 watts, and substitutes lower front-mounted speakers for the GA's full-sided approach.

Viewsonic skimps on the controls, too, giving you strictly front-panel analog buttons. With no onscreen indicators, it's harder to finetune audio volume and screen adjustments.

If price is your key concern, skip the multimedia and buy yourself a top-notch standard 17-inch display, such as Nokia's $699 Valugraph 447L. (Viewsonic; 800-888-8583; **www.viewsonic.com**; PC/Mac; $699) ■

By J. Daniel Jones

Family-Room PCs

Gateway's Destination is a cross between a computer and a big-screen TV.

It's a tough call: Do you get a big-screen TV and stereo system for the family room, or spring for a new, fully equipped Pentium PC for the den? The PC plays better games, of course, but it's essentially a *personal* computer, while the whole family can enjoy the entertainment system.

Fortunately, you may not have to choose. The merging of TVs, stereos, and computers is no longer just theory—it's hardware you can take home and put in your living room. The latest wave in home entertainment is the big-screen, family-room PC, incorporating television, stereo, and computer technology—and applications—into a single system.

While these hybrids may look like a cross between an overgrown computer and a home-entertainment system on steroids, they're actually a whole new animal. And they cost more than all their forebears combined—up to $5,000 for a complete system.

Right now, the only living-room PCs you can buy are computers learning to be TV sets. Mail-order giant Gateway 2000 has been shipping its Destination system since April, the same month that start-up computer company NetTV began selling its competing product, the WorldVision. By next year, you'll have similar options from ambitious television manufacturers such as Mitsubishi, Thomson (owners of the RCA, GE, and ProScan brand who are teaming up with Compaq Computer), and Sony.

The two living-room PCs now on the market share a number of attractive features. Both the Destination and the WorldVision are based on Pentium processors and sport wireless keyboards, and, to paraphrase Henry Ford, they come in any color you'd like, as long as it's black (to blend in with your other home entertainment components, of course). Both systems let you watch television while you use your computer. And, so you can Net and channel surf simultaneously, they both come with 28.8Kbps modems.

Sounds like the systems are pretty similar. A closer look, however, reveals some key differences between them.

Your Destination...Maybe

The first thing you'll notice about the Gateway 2000 Destination is its 31-inch VGA monitor. This giant monolith runs at a fixed 640-by-480 non-interlaced video resolution and features a Mitsubishi picture tube with electronics from MAG InnoVision. Driving this monster VGA display is a customized video board that contains a cable-ready TV tuner and standard NTSC composite inputs. You'll also find inputs for the higher-quality S-video signal.

To get the normal TV signals to display on the VGA monitor, the Destination uses another custom chip set that converts standard interlaced TV signals into non-interlaced output by doubling each line of video. What this means is that in order for you to view a standard TV program or a video tape, the computer must be up and running.

The big question, of course, is, What kind of TV picture do you get in this smart boobtube? "Side by side, focus-group comparisons of the Destination and comparable-quality TV sets, with each displaying television signals, have shown that the Destination is at least as good as a standard television set," claims Tom Grueskin, a Gateway 2000 product manager. On the computer side, at least, the Destination offers a clearly superior display—much crisper than you'd expect from a monitor that size.

The next question is, How does it stack up on the audio side? The Destination's standard output comes courtesy of a custom-made, high-fidelity, wavetable sound card. The optional harman/kardon High-Fidelity Sound System delivers the actual audio through a seven-piece Dolby ProLogic Surround Sound system (with sub-woofer) that produces enough wall-shaking, home-theater sound to fill any size room.

If you already have a stereo, you can hook the Destination to it via industry-standard RCA jacks. Gateway claims that its special sound-card design minimizes the hissing problem that can occur when you connect standard PC sound cards to a stereo system.

Other pertinent specs of the base Destination system include your choice of a 133MHz or 166MHz Pentium, 16MB of RAM, a 2.5GB hard drive, and a 8X CD-ROM drive. You control the Destination through a radio-frequency (RF) wireless keyboard that also includes a track pad like the one on Macintosh PowerBooks. There's also a

ILLUSTRATION BY ANTHONY LUKBAN

wireless, trackball/remote-control FieldMouse. The FieldMouse works as the "TV only" remote, too, but again, only when the computer is up and running.

Linking the TV and PC functions allows the Destination system to use special harman TV-viewing software and integrated *TV Guide* software. The combination lets you download listings for the entire week's worth of TV shows and sort through programs using a number of criteria—titles, leading actors, day and time, or even general show descriptions such as drama, sports, or sitcom.

As with all Gateway computer systems, you can configure system specs such as memory and hard-drive size to your specifications. The base Destination lists for $4,199, with the sound system adding another $700.

From ABC News to abc.com

NetTV, a start-up computer company whose product line consists solely of a big-screen PC, the WorldVision, takes a slightly different approach. Rather than totally integrate the TV and the PC, the WorldVision combines them.

The big difference is that the WorldVision monitor doubles as a stand-alone TV set—the computer doesn't need to be on for the TV to work. NetTV even includes a remote for TV control when you don't have the computer booted up.

That's important to many people. "We use it as a regular TV most of the time," says WorldVision owner Mike Stark of San Rafael, Calif. "I was going to buy a regular TV as well because I was kind of skeptical of what the picture quality would be, but I think it's excellent."

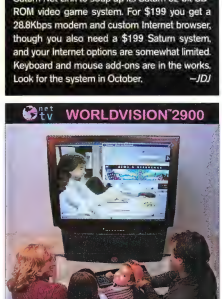
Unlike the Destination system, the WorldVision also comes with 6-watt-per channel stereo speakers built into the set itself, further enhancing the stand-alone TV capabilities. The sound is comparable to that from the built-in speakers on any high-end TV set. And, like the Destination, the WorldVision has RCA audio-output jacks to allow you to hook the system into your home stereo.

NetTV also gives you more options in the computer itself, beginning with a selection of Pentium processors ranging from 100MHz to 166MHz. You also get your choice of 8MB or 16MB of RAM and either a 1GB or 1.6GB hard drive. A quad-speed CD-ROM drive (which may have been upgraded to 8X by the time you read this) rounds out the standard equipment. Currently, only a 29-inch display is available, but by the end of this summer the company plans to offer models ranging up to a 37-inch behemoth.

Set-Top Surfers

If you don't need a full-fledged computer and just want to explore the Internet and play games on your TV set, you have a couple of other options. Bandai Digital Entertainment's Pippin @World is basically a crippled Macintosh PowerPC with a non-standard keyboard and gamepad that will run slightly modified Macintosh programs. The @World also offers easy Internet access, though to get there, you'll have to go through PSINet, whose price is a bit higher than standard ($24.95 per month for unlimited access). Bandai's product will be available in September for $599, and includes a modem, a keyboard, and a game controller with a trackball pointing device.

Still too much? Sega has announced a Saturn Net Link to soup up its Saturn 32-bit CD-ROM video game system. For $199 you get a 28.8Kbps modem and custom Internet browser, though you also need a $199 Saturn system, and your Internet options are somewhat limited. Keyboard and mouse add-ons are in the works. Look for the system in October. *–JDJ*



NetTV's WorldVision even lets you watch TV when the computer is off.

Rather than being located on the computer, the video and audio inputs are on the WorldVision's monitor itself. This allows you to use VCRs and other video devices when the monitor is running sans computer. You also get a direct RGB video input for video and additional computer devices using that video standard. Finally, in addition to the standard 640-by-480 resolution, the WorldVision monitor supports Super VGA resolutions at 800-by-600 and 1024-by-768. This gives you more real estate for cramming the most amount of information onto the screen. But be warned: The higher the numbers, the smaller the text and icons. When you take into account the .71 dot pitch of the monitor, that can be a problem. And overall, it's just not as crisp as the Destination.

Instead of the Destination's interactive *TV Guide*, WorldVision includes an excellent channel-scanning function that captures a still frame of 12 different channels in one sweep. This feature is a subset of WorldVision's built-in video-frame capture capability, something that the Destination lacks.

The WorldVision uses an infrared version of the Destination's RF wireless keyboard. There are advantages and disadvantages to both systems. Infrared signals are easily blocked by objects between the keyboard and receiver, but RF transmissions are more susceptible to interference from other radio signals.

Picking and Choosing

At $2,995, a base WorldVision unit costs some $1,200 less than an equivalent Destination system, and does basically the same thing. And this price difference doesn't even include the Gateway unit's optional sound system, while the WorldVision has built-in sound.

If you spend the majority of your time surfing the Net, you'll want the superior screen of the Destination system. If, however, you just want to play games, you may not mind putting up with the difference in screen clarity and sound quality to save yourself some big bucks. (Of course, neither system ships with a wireless joystick, a glaring omission from the complete living-room PC/TV.)

If the price of either machine seems a bit steep, hang on till next year for products from the major TV manufacturers. Devices like RCA's "Genius TV" are likely to be less-expensive machines with limited computing horsepower, storage, and memory, but they'll have high-definition screens, DVD (digital versatile disc) players, and at least some ability to surf the Net.

Yet, for dedicated computer gamers with the scratch to afford them, today's living-room PCs offer cutting-edge technology, slick industrial design, and unbeatable big-screen excitement. Why wait? (Destination: Gateway 2000, 800-846-2309, **www.gwzk.com**, starting at $4,199; WorldVision: NetTV, 800-440-6388, **www.net-tv.tangent.com**, starting at $2,999) ■

By Tom Marshall

Hardware Spotlight

Ever since the neck-wrenching success of Doom, we've been hanging on promises about 3-D technology for PCs. Doom showed what texture-mapped video could do for 3-D gaming, but since then, gamers and developers alike have been slavering to get past that smash hit's relatively mushy resolution and jerky real-time limitations. From on-chip acceleration to Windows 95's DirectX API standard for high-powered multimedia, a brave new world of realistic 3-D has been just around the corner—for almost a year. Well, bate your breath no longer: The first consumer-priced 3-D hardware accelerators are finally here.

New graphics schemes from S3 Corp. and nVidia Corp. offer two ways over the hurdles of low resolution and jerky action. Each takes the place of your existing video card and offers lifelike 3-D graphics and realistic video playback performance. Many more 3-D solutions are on the way (see "E3 Top 25," page 30), but the three boards reviewed below are the first that *PC Games* has been able to subject to hands-on testing.

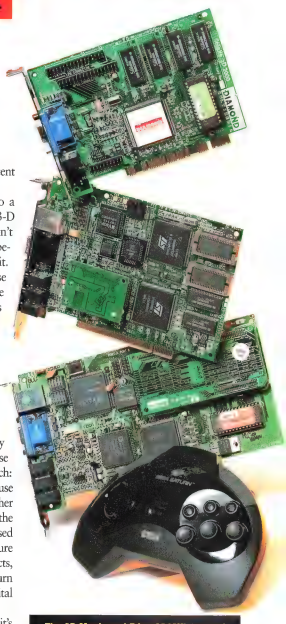
nVidia Corp.'s NV1 approach, reviewed here in Jazz Multimedia's **3D Magic** and Diamond Multimedia Systems' **Edge 3240XL** cards, has its sights set on the more ambitious target: integrated high-level multimedia performance with wavetable audio, Sega Saturn controller compatibility, and on-board digital gameports. Diamond's **Stealth 3D 2000**, on the other hand, features S3's ViRGE chip for lower-cost 2-D and 3-D acceleration without the extras. All three PCI cards work with Windows 95, while the Stealth card also works under Windows 3.1 and DOS. Both NV1 boards come in lower-cost DRAM and higher-performance VRAM versions, while the more budget-conscious Stealth is strictly a DRAM card.

Both S3 and nVidia are signing on game vendors as fast as you can say "Draw!" and each of their cards comes with two or three games optimized for the particular graphics controller. For both the Diamond Edge and 3D Magic, it's PC versions of the Saturn hits Panzer Dragoon and Virtua Fighter, plus a 3-D version of NASCAR Racing. The Stealth 3D, meanwhile, has 3-D versions of Descent II and Destruction Derby.

Unfortunately, this bundling points to a big problem with this first generation of 3-D cards: Your fancy new card probably won't deliver much benefit unless games are specially configured to take advantage of it. Worse, games optimized for one of these graphics accelerators won't work with the other, let alone with non-3-D cards. This situation is almost certain to change when Microsoft's DirectX has established a Windows 95 gaming standard. When that happens, Diamond and Jazz plan to continue supporting these early cards by offering updated drivers that will enable you to run them with all games that meet the standard.

Even within nVidia's Windows 95–only NV1 scheme, things get a little tricky, because the company takes a two-tiered approach: DRAM versions of NV1 boards actually use SGS Thomson's STG2000 accelerator rather than nVidia's own NV1, which appears on the VRAM cards. However, both chips are based on nVidia's integrated multimedia architecture and include an impressive range of 3-D effects, advanced wavetable audio, two Sega Saturn control-pad ports, and an enhanced digital gameport for precise control.

Given all these different combinations, it's easy to get confused. We tested the following configurations: 3D Magic with the STG2000 and 2MB DRAM; the Edge 3240XL with the actual NV1 and 2MB VRAM; and the Stealth 3D 2000 with S3's ViRGE and 2MB DRAM. Here's a firsthand look at how they stack up in terms of ease of installation, 2-D graphics performance, and, of course, 3-D performance.



The 3D Magic and Edge 3240XL support Saturn controllers and wavetable sound, while the Stealth 3D does only graphics.

3D Magic

Rating: C

Physically installing the 3D Magic was a simple matter of replacing the existing video card, plugging in a cable to a satellite Sega Saturn control-pad board, and patching the 3D Magic's sound output to my PC's existing sound card.

Windows 95 recognized the new video card and prompted me for drivers during bootup, then recognized the card as a new audio/multimedia device and again prompted me for drivers, which were all supplied on a bundled CD-ROM. A reboot later I was ready for action, and I popped Panzer Dragoon into the CD drive.

This game's optional full-screen animation and stereo sound provided a good test of the system. I was impressed with the resolution and the action—objects seemed to approach with smoothly increasing definition, unlike the stepped approach you find in games like Doom. At a few points, the system invariably hiccuped as it waited for something to catch up, but for the most part the action flowed

smoothly, with full 3-D freedom and crisp response to the controls.

I noticed a widely spaced vertical line texture on my Windows 95 desktop with this card, probably owing to a glitch in the driver. Otherwise, non-game video performance was about the same as it had been with my previous 2-D graphics accelerator packing similar DRAM. To reap the benefit of the card's sound enhancements, I tried setting my Windows 95 sound control for SRS Surround Sound. I noticed no difference, in or out of the game. This was probably due to my being unable to connect the CD drive's audio to the 3D Magic card for lack of a cable with the proper terminals. The documentation didn't even mention this feature, but a call to Jazz Multimedia revealed that my card should have come with a cable.

Another hassle: If you plan on running any DOS games, you'll have to hook up your existing sound card to the 3D Magic, because nVidia currently offers no sound drivers for DOS.

The 3D Magic is also available in a 1MB DRAM version for $229 and a 4MB VRAM version for $399. (Jazz Multimedia; 408-727-8900; $319)

Edge 3240XL

Rating: B

Installing the Edge was slightly more complicated than setting up the 3D Magic, if only because I had the included audio cable, one of those Hydra-headed numbers for connecting any of a range of CD-ROM drives to the card. As it turned out, I didn't need it; the plug on the Edge itself matched my existing cable.

The 2MB VRAM that came with my Edge made it the fastest draw in the West—or, at the very least, it made my Pentium 150 system run Windows 95 far more crisply than I had thought possible by a simple video upgrade. And the vertical texture added to the desktop by the 3D Magic was gone.

Surprisingly few of these improvements over the 3D Magic board carried over into Panzer Dragoon, though. The display may have been a touch more sharply resolved, or the live-action video a tad smoother, or there may have been one less hiccup per episode. But in this game, the overall feel of the video was barely stronger than the 3D Magic's.

The audio was an entirely different story. Piping the game's sound through the Edge resulted in a striking improvement over the sound provided by my system's Sound Blaster AWE32 alone; too bad Panzer Dragoon's music wasn't equally impressive. Unfortunately, for DOS games, you must resort to your existing sound card, the same way you do with the 3D Magic.

The Edge is also available in a 1MB DRAM version for $199, a 2MB DRAM version for $229, and a 4MB VRAM version for $549. (Diamond Multimedia Systems; 800-468-5846; $399)

Stealth 3D 2000

Rating: B

With no audio patches or Sega controller to plug in, the Stealth card offered the simplest installation of all—just a swap of PCI video cards. And, as with the 3D Magic card, general 2-D performance was about the same as it had been with a similarly equipped non-3-D video board.

Yet when I dropped the CD-ROM of Descent II optimized for ViRGE into the drive, installed the game, and started to play, the difference was crystal clear. The Stealth 3D 2000's reason for existence is enhanced 3-D graphics for gaming, pure and simple.

As with the two other boards, what I was impressed with most was the game's sharp texture-mapping and smoothly scaling animation (aside from the shoot-'em-up action, of course, and the ease with which I found myself upside down).

Descent II, clearly a Doom descendent, doesn't aim for the kind of movielike depth and motion seen in Panzer Dragoon, so it's hard to compare the hardware capabilities of cards running such different games. But my feeling is that the ViRGE chip's 3-D acceleration is roughly equal to that of the NV1-based boards. (Diamond Multimedia Systems; 800-468-5846; $199) ■

Gaming Hardware Hall of Fame

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Category	Product	Details	Our Rating
PC	Packard Bell Platinum Pro 166	Packard Bell; 800-733-5858; $3,299	A-
Monitor	Nokia Valugraph 447L	Nokia; 800-296-6542; $699	B+
CD-ROM drive	Toshiba TXM3501E1	Toshiba; 714-457-0777; price not available	B+
Sound card	AWE32 PNP	Creative Labs; 800-998-5227; $249.95	A
Speakers	SoundWorks	Cambridge SoundWorks; 800-367-4434; $219	A+
Joystick	F-16 Combatstick	CH Products; 619-598-2518; $69.95	A+
Gamepad	GrIP system	Advanced Gravis; 800-663-8558; $99.95	A+
Modem	Supra 28.8	Supra; 800-727-8772; $219 internal, $299 external	A
Graphics card	Diamond Stealth 64	Diamond Multimedia; 800-468-5846; $229	A-
Key add-on	NEC MultiSync M700	NEC; 800-632-4636; $899	A-

TECH SHOP

By Patrick Marshall

DirectX, ways to run Warcraft, the cracked-disc blues, and more.

S.O.S.

DirectX Talk

Recently some Win 95 demos on your PC Games CD-ROM have required something called DirectX. What is the purpose of DirectX? And what will the installation of it do to my system?
Karen Zollinger
karenz@sisna.com.

The purpose of DirectX is, in a word, speed. Specifically, DirectX is a Windows 95 application programming interface (API) that lets game developers create Windows drivers that can directly access hardware when displaying graphics, playing audio, and implementing other multimedia features. The result is faster, smoother performance compared to going through Windows' older graphics device interface (GDI).

The main features of DirectX include:

DirectDraw—improves your video speed

Direct3D—supports 3-D graphics

DirectPlay—allows person-to-person and network games

DirectInput—supports advanced joysticks and other input devices

DirectSound—provides enhanced sound buffering and mixing

DirectDraw, Direct3D, and DirectPlay were not available when Windows 95 first shipped, so you'll have to get the appropriate driver from the manufacturer of your video card. You may also find DirectDraw drivers provided by some game vendors. Keep in mind, however, that installing the drivers will result in better performance only for games that have been specifically designed to take advantage of DirectX. (For more on DirectX, see "Direct From Microsoft," June 1996, page 19.)

Warcraft Woes

I recently purchased Warcraft II. I own a 486SX computer with 8MB of RAM, but initially, I was unable to run the game with full graphics, sound effects, and music. I was able to run it in Windows with no sound effects, and in DOS with no sound effects and limited graphics (there was about a two-inch horizontal line of garbled graphics). I made a boot disk to disable my SmartDrive, but this did no good until I accidentally discovered that if I started with the boot disk, went straight to Windows, then exited to DOS, the game works perfectly. I'm glad it's working, but I still don't understand why.
Neal Round
Theodore, AL

It appears that one of two things may be causing this situation. Your accidental fix may be loading some drivers necessary for sound that aren't loading otherwise. Or—and this is more likely—you're no longer loading other drivers that may be conflicting with your sound card drivers.

To solve your mystery, print out the contents of the AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS files on both your hard drive and your boot-disk floppy, as well as your WIN.INI file, and compare them. Check which drivers are loading. You'll have to experiment with remarking out various drivers (type "REM" at the beginning of the line in the file) to pinpoint any conflicts.

As for running DOS programs in a Windows window, most systems have trouble scraping up the necessary amount of free conventional memory. That's why so many DOS games offer to create boot disks. It's a pain to have to reboot your system, but that's often the only way to play.

Check It Out

I would like to know whether those CHKLIST.MS files on my computer's hard drive are important. If so, what exactly are they for?
Warren
Address unavailable

CHKLIST.MS files *are* important. That is, they're important if you want your Microsoft Anti-Virus program to protect your system. This program creates a CHKLIST.MS file in each directory you scan. This file contains "checksums"—a record of the number of bits—for each program in the directory. When the anti-virus program rescans the directory it checks the CHKLIST.MS file to make sure that none of the programs has increased in size. A difference in checksum values indicates possible infection by a virus.

Cracked Up

I recently bought a 6X CD-ROM drive, and almost immediately after installing it, I put in a CD demo with a big crack on half of the disc. Now the drive seems a little slow, and it jumps when playing music CDs. Could something have happened to the CD drive? Do I have to buy a new one, or can I exchange the drive with its warranty?
E.M.D
San German, P.R.

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continued on page 94

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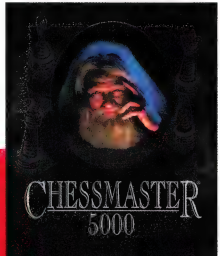

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TECH SHOP *continued from page 92*

disc is still flat and doesn't have any actual gaps in it, the chances of it damaging your CD-ROM drive are very slim. Of course, that doesn't mean you don't have a bad CD-ROM drive or controller card. If you've tried other discs and they aren't working properly, I'd recommend returning the drive to the manufacturer. That's exactly what warranties are for.

Viewing MIMEs

I get my e-mail through the Microsoft Network. I haven't had any difficulty receiving text files, but I have problems when someone sends me an image in MIME format. Can you give me a step-by-step procedure on how to extract the attached image files?

D. Larsen
Address unavailable

Sure. First, get an e-mail program that supports MIME. Second, follow the program's procedures for opening attachments.

Fact is, although the Microsoft Network (MSN) offers access to the Internet and the World Wide Web, and though you can send and receive mail across the Internet from MSN, its mail program is not an Internet program. MIME, Multipurpose Internet Mail Extensions, is a format for encoding binary data attachments for transmission across the Internet. MIME is necessary because Internet mail was designed to handle 7-bit text messages, not the 8-bit character sets used by most application file formats.

Most non-Internet e-mail packages, including Microsoft Exchange and Lotus cc:Mail, make it very easy to send and receive attachments. But they don't support the MIME format unless you buy a special Internet gateway. In short, you'll have to get a MIME-compatible Internet e-mail program to open them with, such as Windows Pegasus Mail, Unix PINE, or Macintosh Eudora. ■

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PC GAMES

Name that Game, and Win!

This year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) marked the announcement of hundreds of new computer games. On this page, you see screen shots from 15 of them. If you want to win this month's *PC Games* Talk Back contest, all you have to do is correctly identify these games.

Get them all right and you'll qualify for a drawing for a free one-year subscription to *PC Games* (complete with monthly CD-ROM), plus a package of game-related goodies–games, hint books, T-shirts, and other cool stuff. Four other lucky winners will also win free subscriptions.

Need a hint? Take a close look at our E3 feature ("The 1996 E3 Top 25") on page 30. After that, you're on your own. Have fun and good luck!

ENTER TO WIN!

To qualify, be sure to return your picks by August 23, 1996.

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We also wanna know if you play games online, so indulge us by answering a few questions. Thanks!

Do you download games/shareware from the Internet? Yes ____No_____

Do game demos and shareware influence your purchase of games? Yes____No____

Have you seen our Web site (http://www.pcgamesmag.com)? Yes_____No_____

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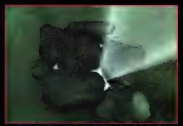
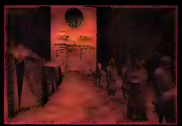
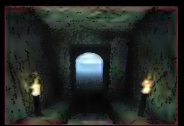


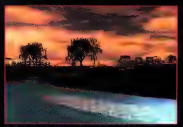
Spiral into the subterranean tomb of Qin Shi Huanghdi.



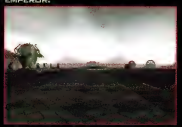
Discover the wonder and mystery of China's most ruthless emperor.



Light torches. Illuminate passages. Enlighten your mind.



Explore five photo-realistic realms of perilous beauty and splendor.



Incredibly beautiful, high resolution, 3-D rendered graphic adventure game.

"Indiana Jones meets *Myst*."

—Steven Greenlee, Computer Game Review

QIN (CHING)

Enter the epic adventure game where the ultimate weapon is...your mind.

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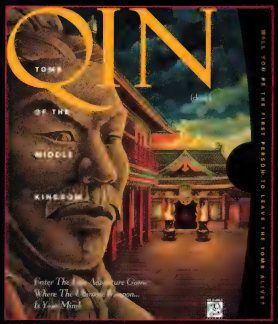
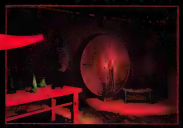
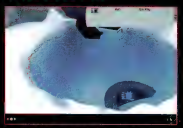
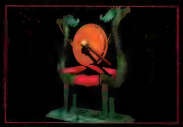




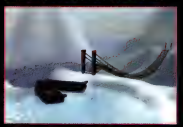
Solve puzzles and avoid traps as you find your way toward multiple game endings.



Compass guided navigation with pull-down realm maps to guide you through the tomb.



Music score recorded on authentic period Chinese instruments creates a full stereo soundscape.



Do you possess the wisdom to unearth the tomb's secret?

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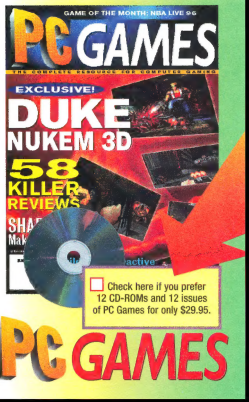

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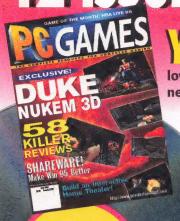

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